















 Grass by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim

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# GRASS

KEUM SUK GENDRY-KIM

Translated by Janet Hong

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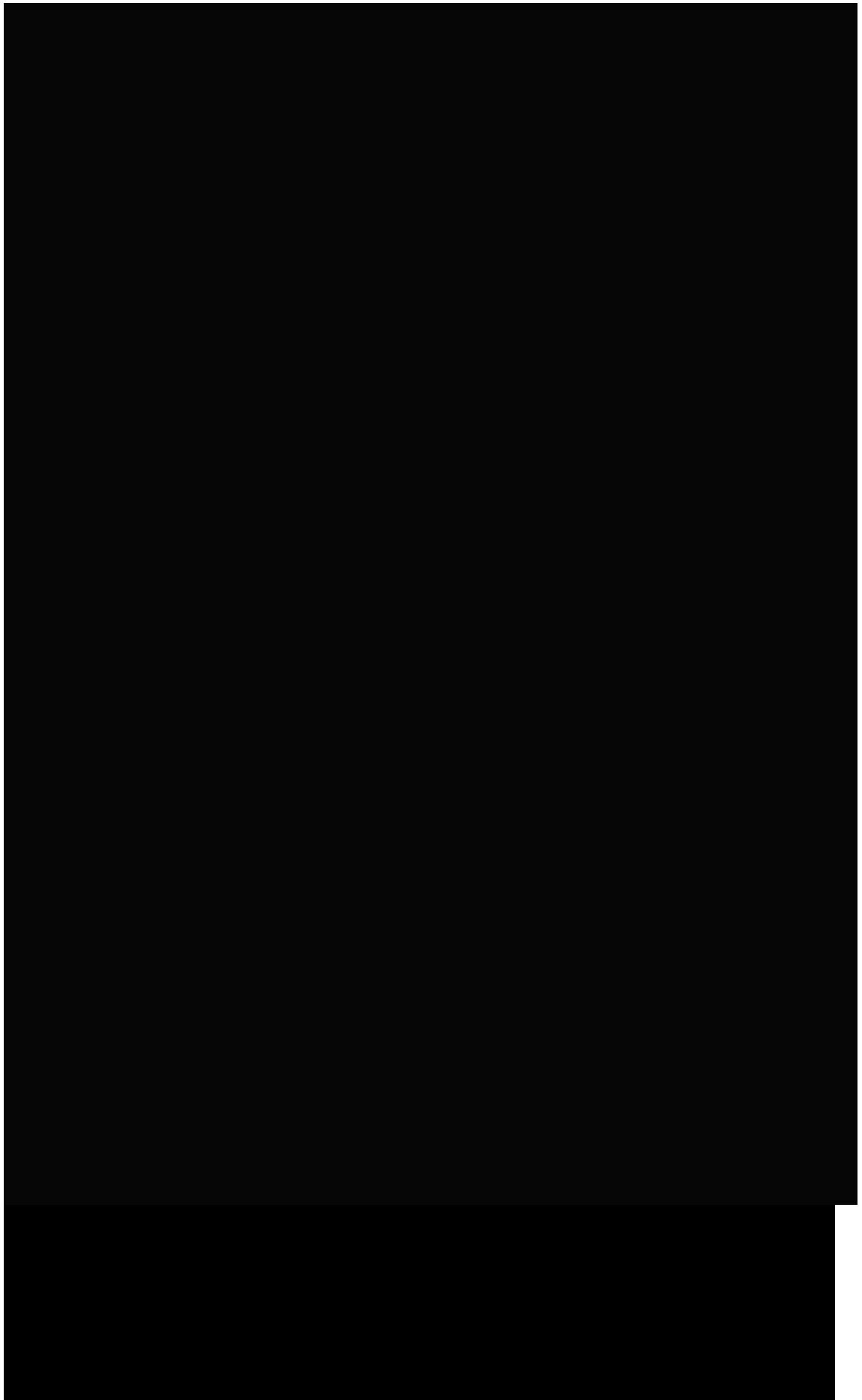


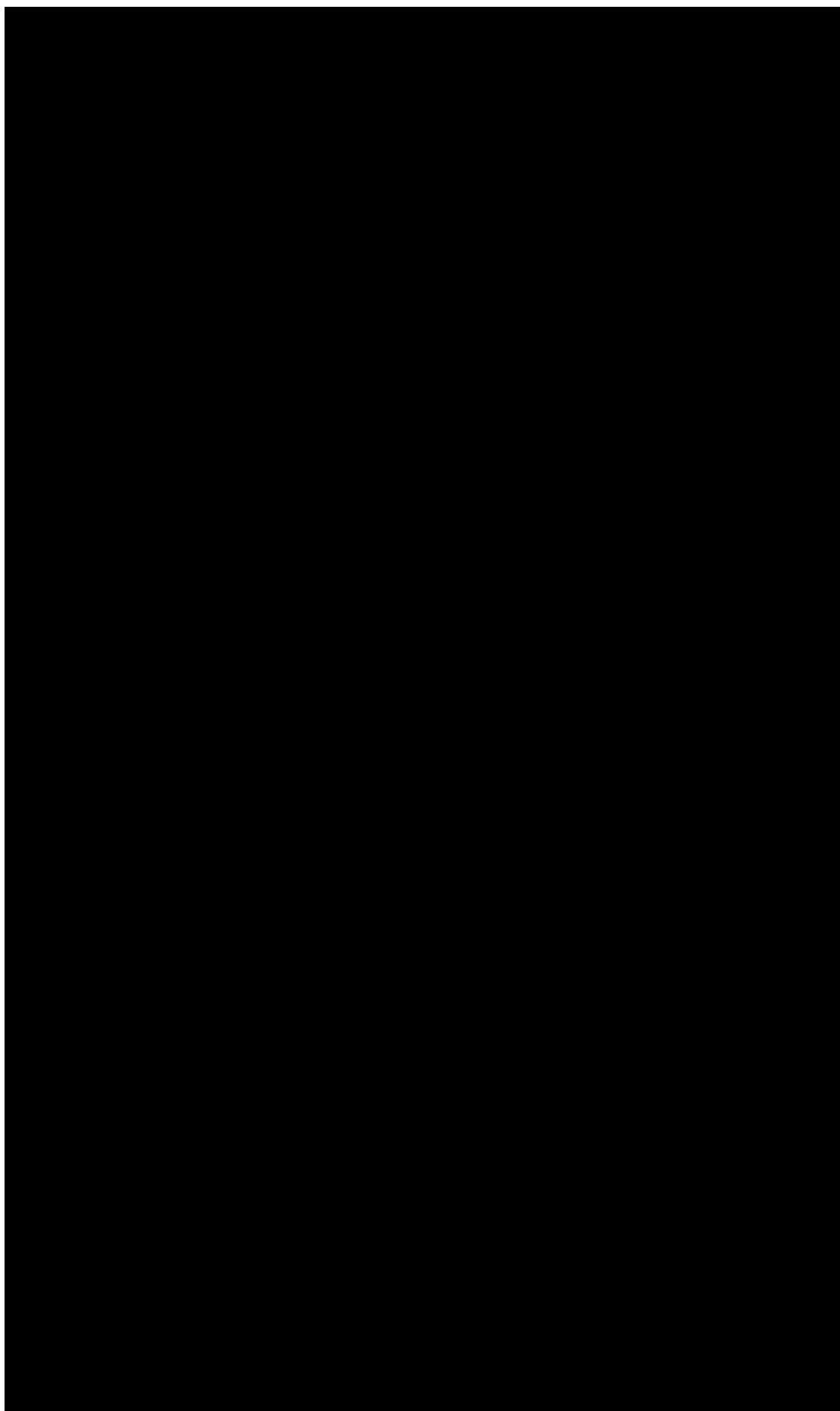


The term "comfort women" is widely used to refer to the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery. A direct translation of the Japanese euphemism for "prostitute," *ianfu*, the term continues to be controversial, especially among survivors and the countries from which they were taken, since it reflects only the perspective of the Japanese military and distorts the victims' experiences. For the purposes of this book, despite its very clear failings, we've opted to use the literal translation, given its common usage within Korea, to refer to this very specific form of forced sexual slavery.







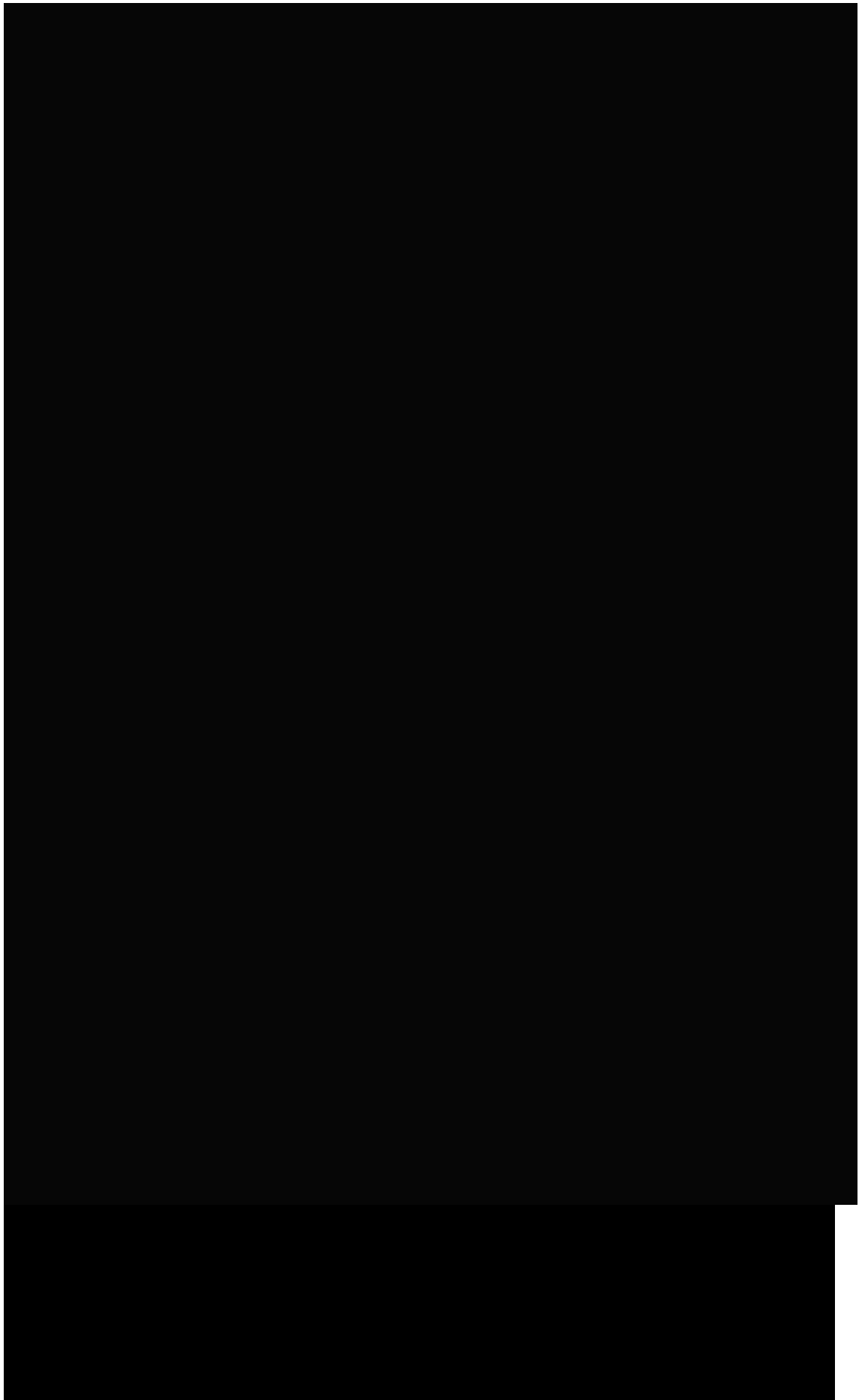


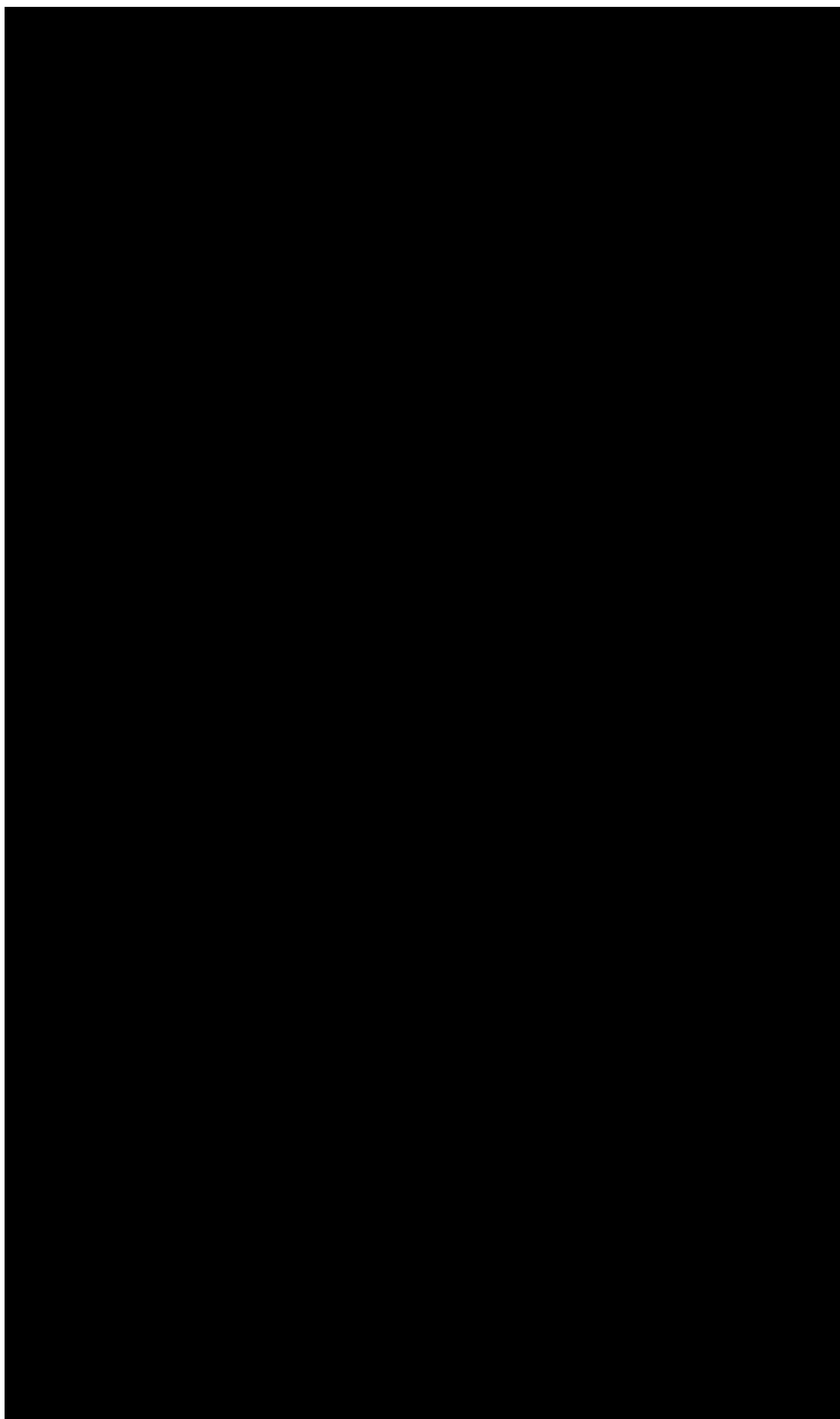
## THE WAY HOME











LONGJING, CHINA, 1996





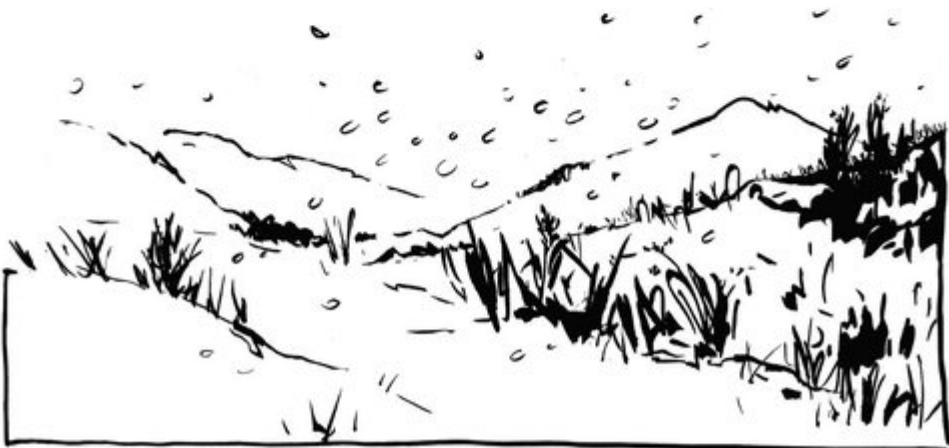
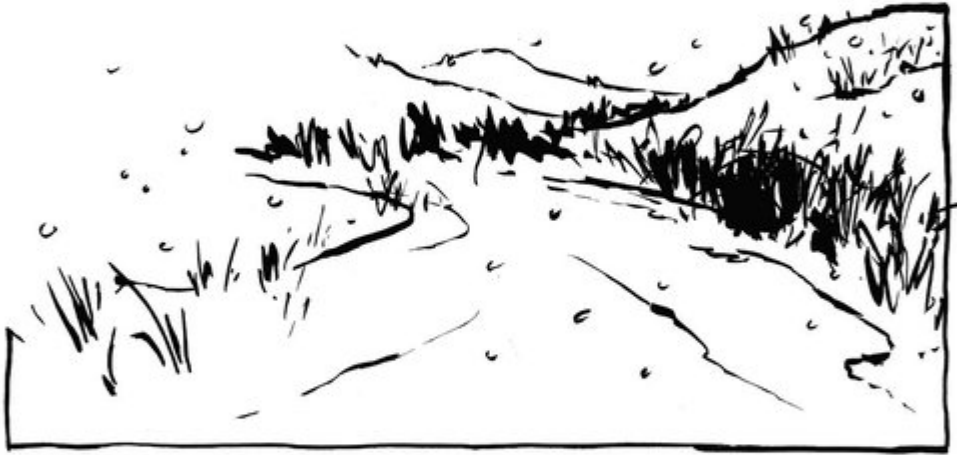






















THE WHOLE VILLAGE CAME TO SEE ME OFF. THE OLD MAN WAS WORRIED I'D NEVER COME BACK. HE WAS SO SICK, HOW COULD I JUSTIFY LEAVING?

JUST LET ME SEE HIM  
ONE LAST TIME...

MOM, REALLY,  
IT'S TIME  
TO GO.

MY DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WAS A GOOD GIRL, BUT SHE ALREADY HAD HER HANDS FULL, LOOKING AFTER THE LITTLE ONES AND MY DEAF SON.



I FELT BAD ABOUT MAKING HER TAKE CARE OF HER SICK FATHER-IN-LAW, TOO.







I NEEDED MY VISA FROM THE KOREAN  
EMBASSY IN BEIJING



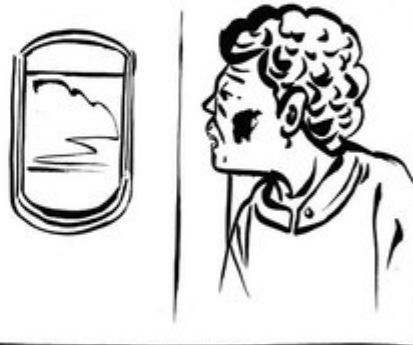
BECAUSE I WAS REPORTED DEAD IN KOREA.



NO MATTER HOW LONG IT'S BEEN, I CAN  
FIND MY WAY BACK HOME WITH MY EYES  
CLOSED. BOSU, BUSAN...



IT TOOK ME FIFTY-FIVE YEARS TO RETURN,  
AND YET THE FLIGHT WAS ONLY TWO HOURS.



FIFTY-FIVE YEARS.





THAT'S HOW LONG IT TOOK TO GO HOME.



\*IN THE WINTER OF 1996, THE SBS DOCUDRAMA *TRACKING EVENTS AND PEOPLE* HELPED GRANNY LEE OK-SUN GO BACK TO KOREA FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIFTY-FIVE YEARS. THE EPISODE "COMFORT WOMEN LEFT IN CHINA RETURN HOME" AIRED JANUARY 4, 1997.



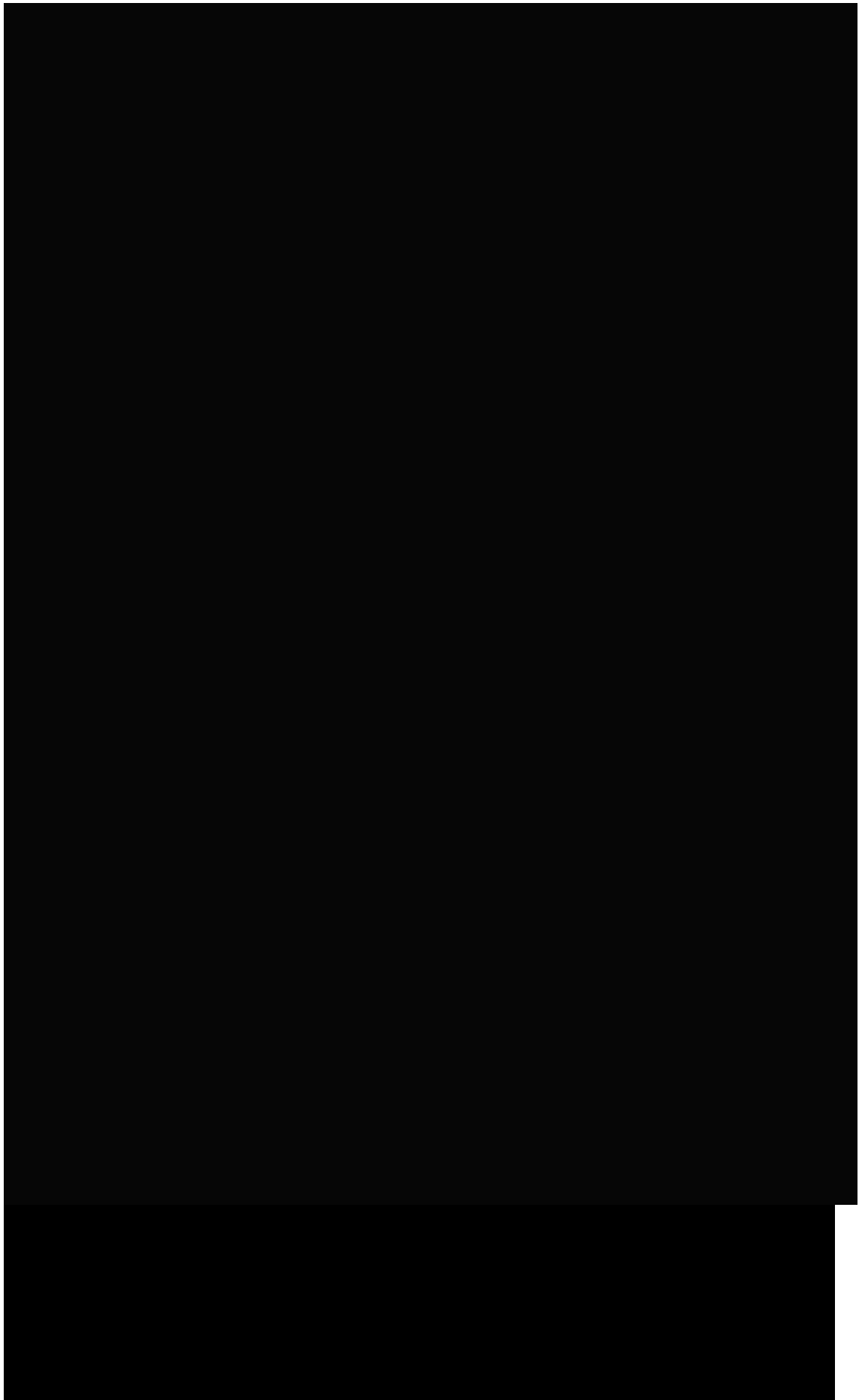
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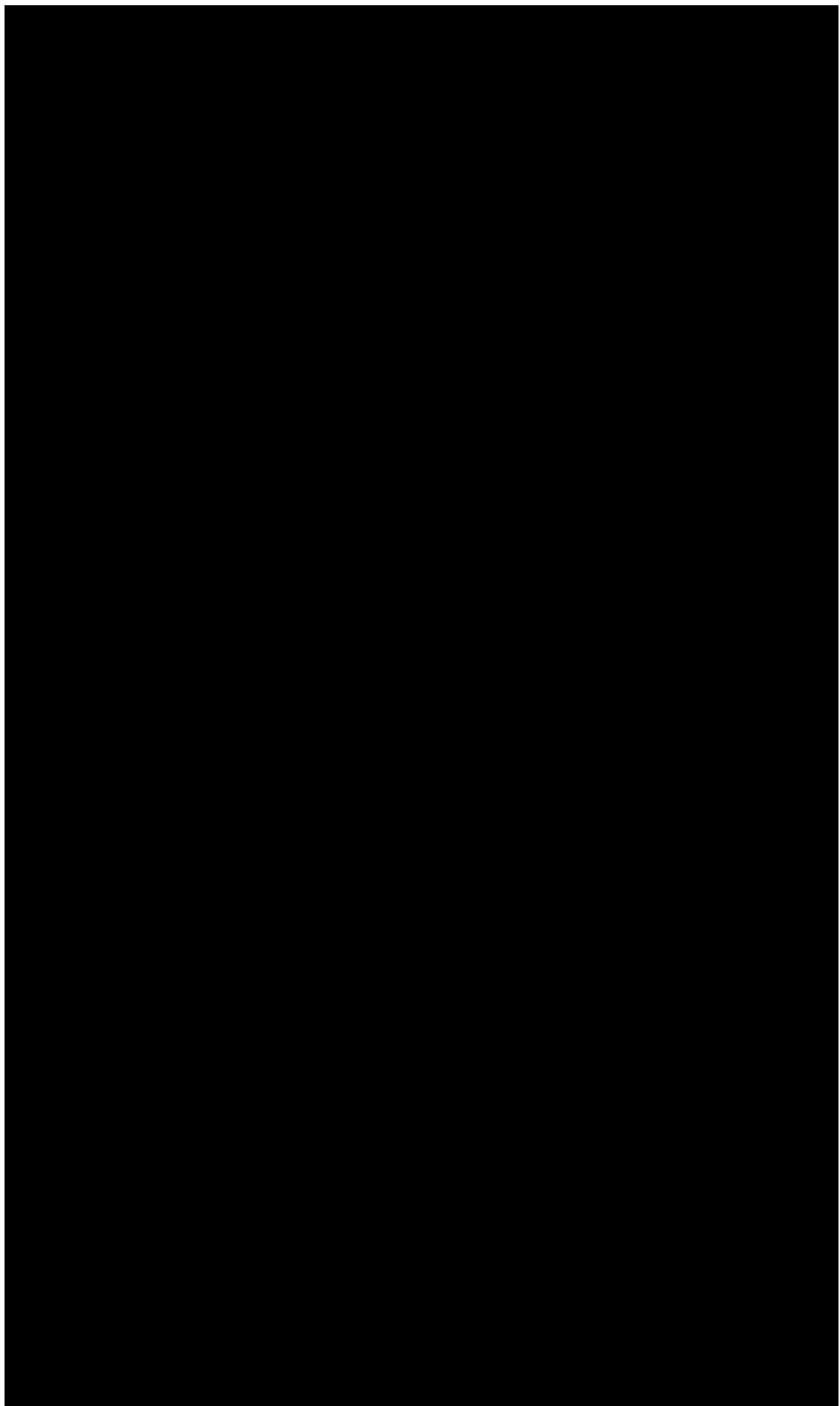








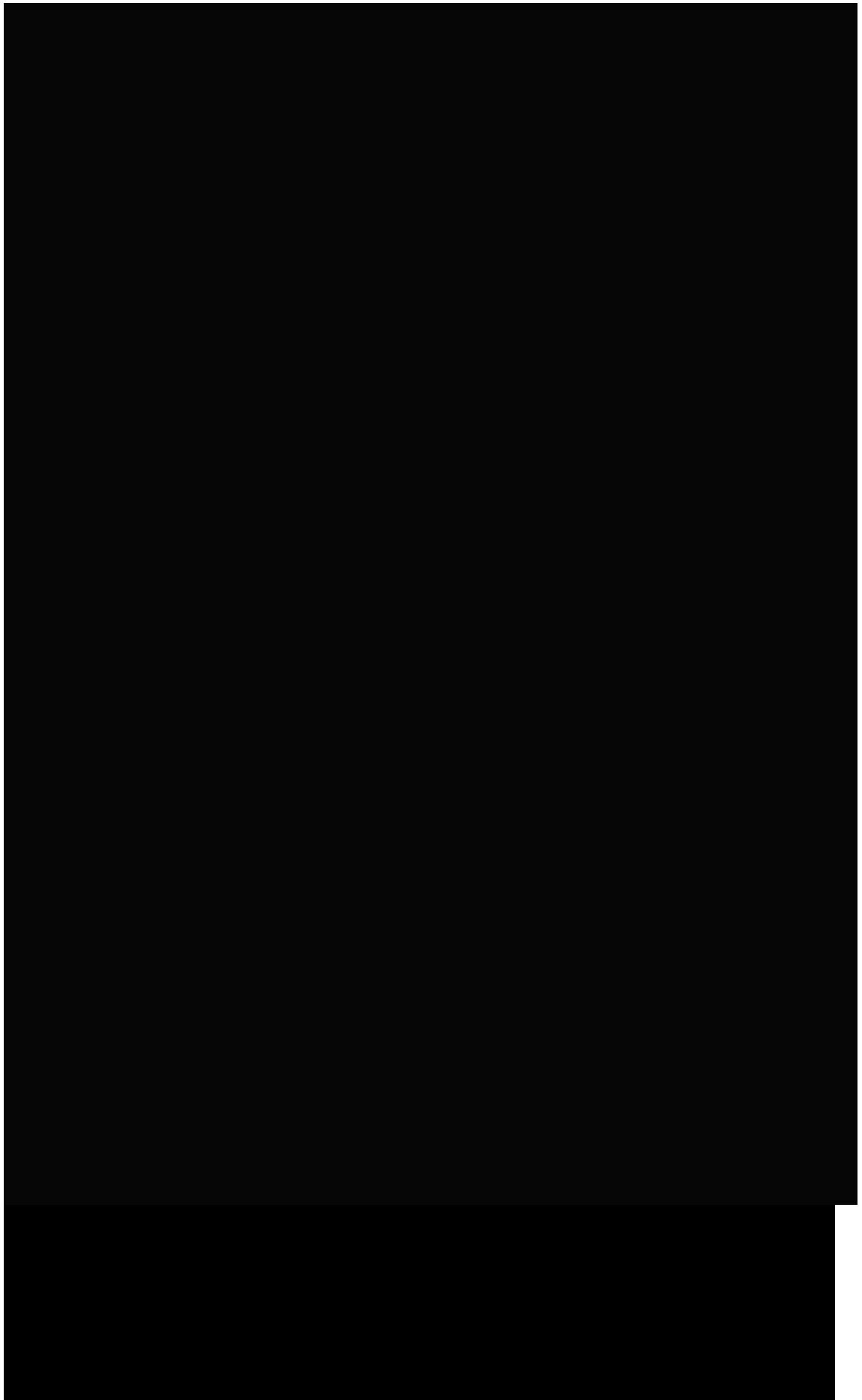


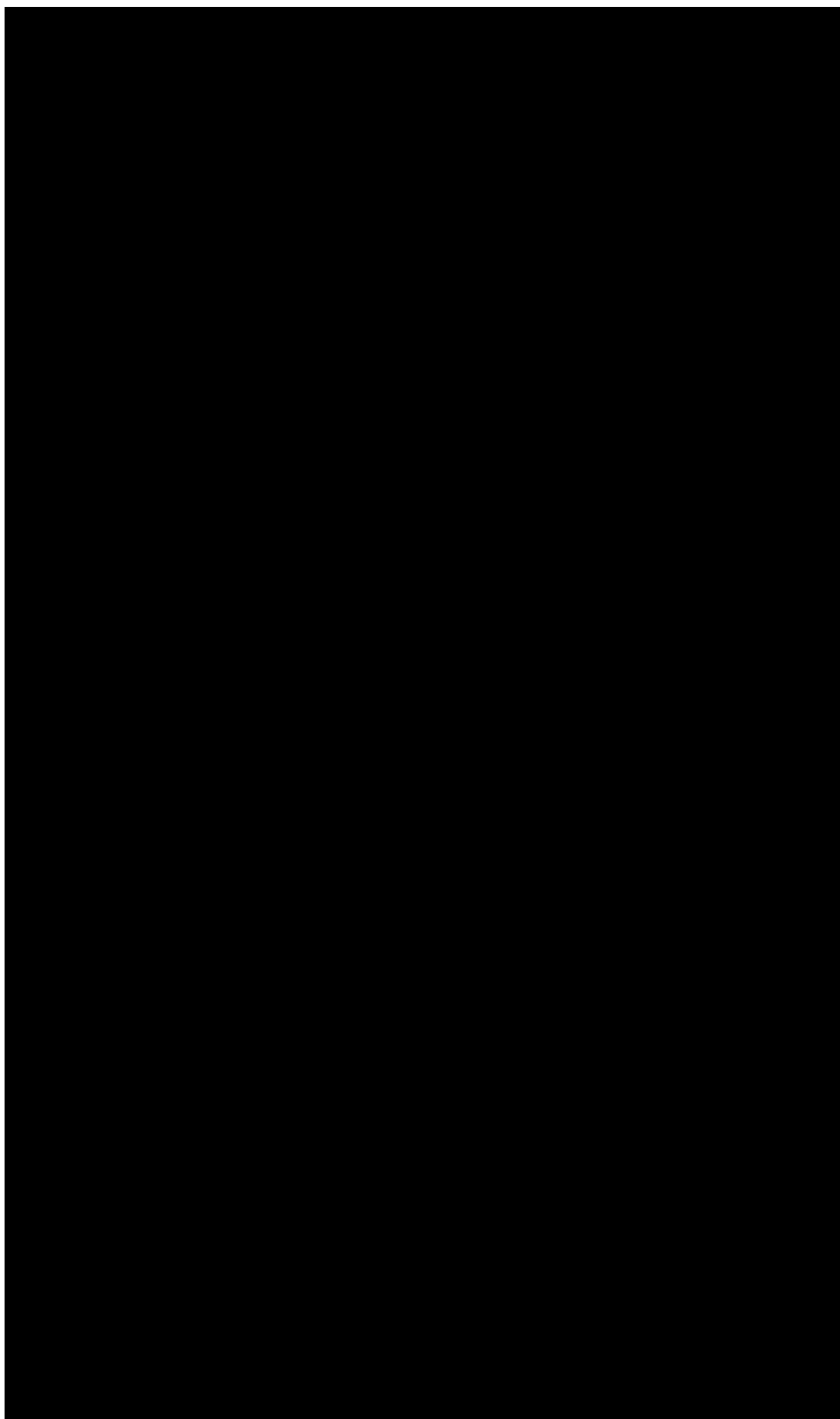


THE GIRL WHO DREAMED OF  
GOING TO SCHOOL









BUSAN, 1934

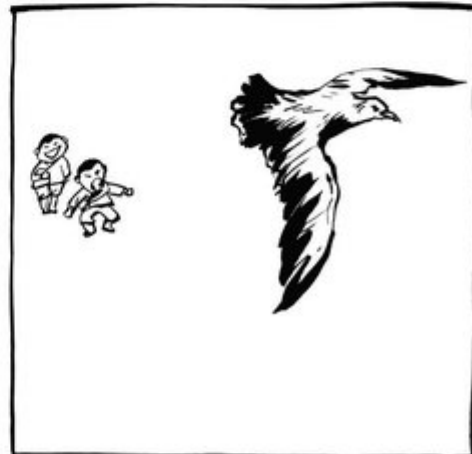




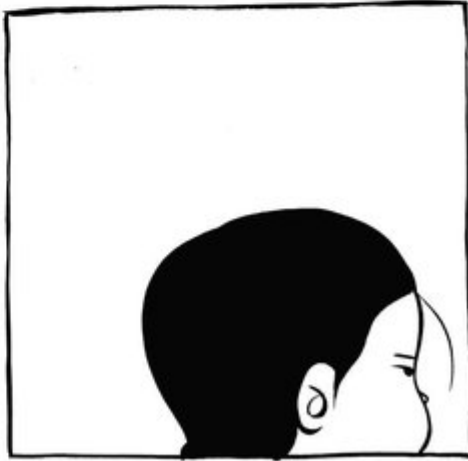
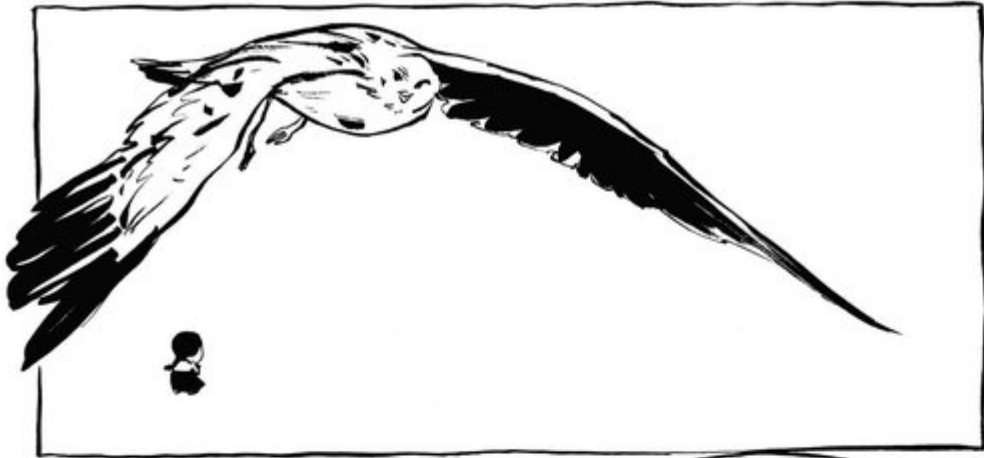




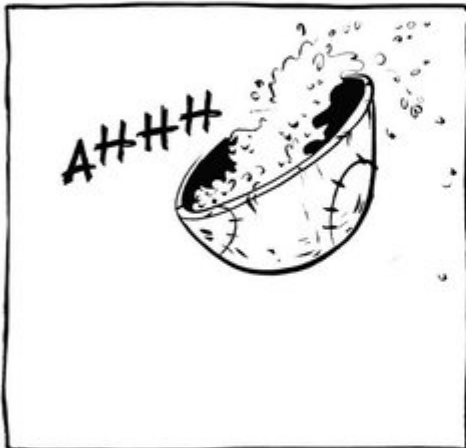






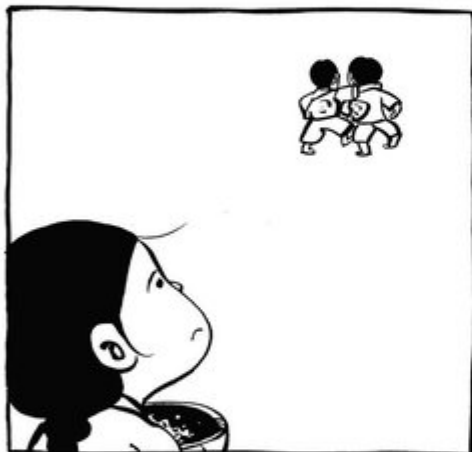


















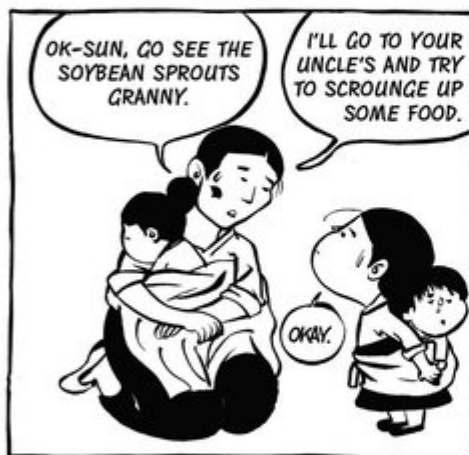








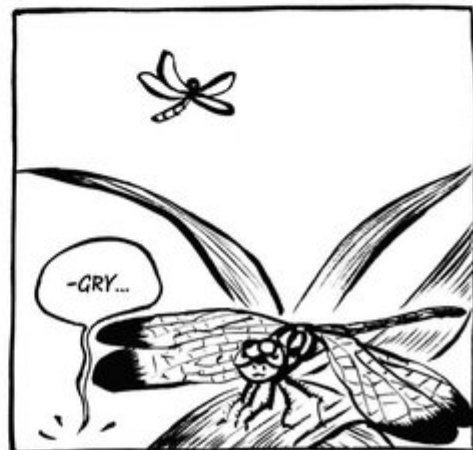
















IT'S ALL MY FAULT.  
SHE WAS SO STARVED SHE  
COLLAPSED ON THE ROAD!



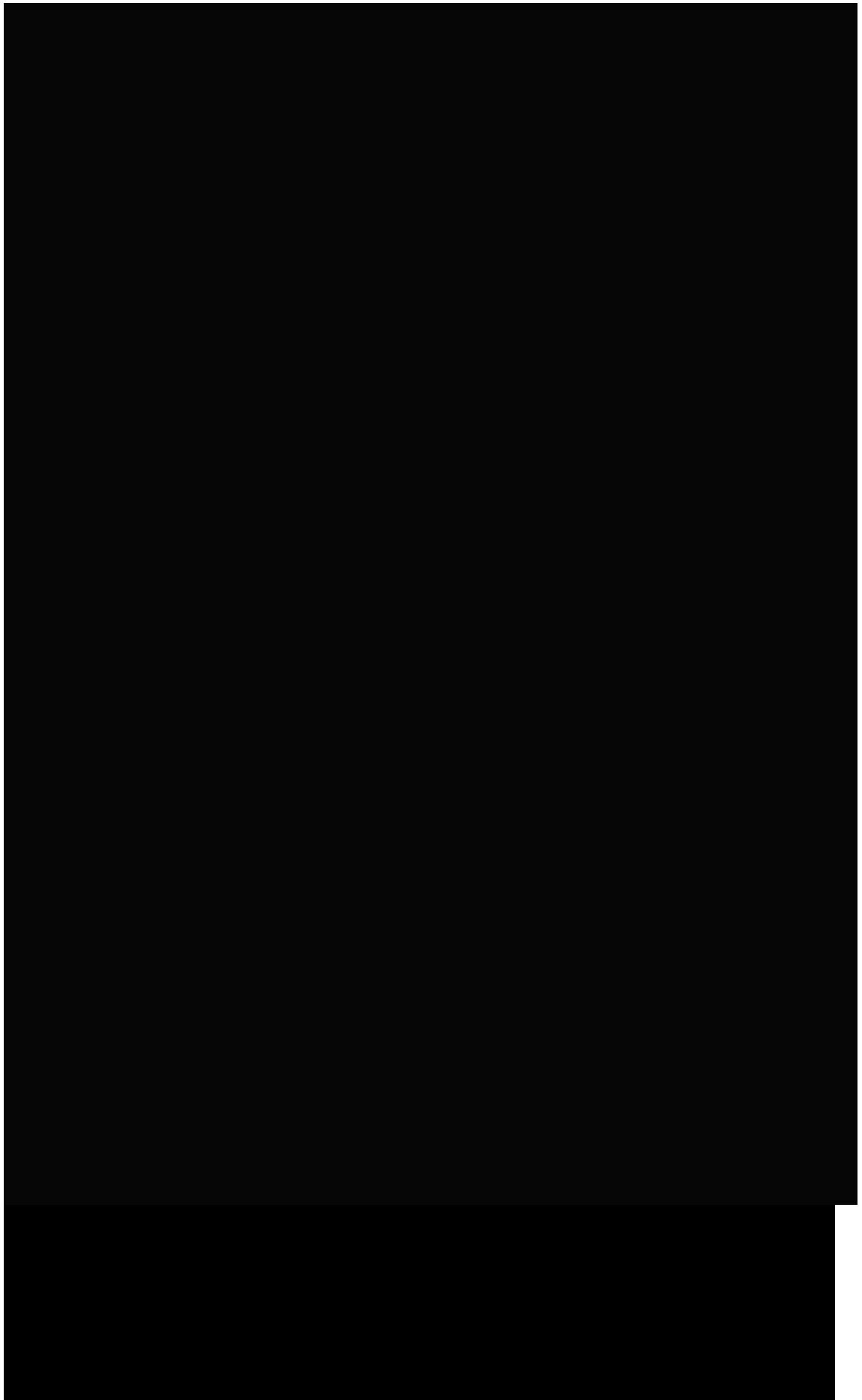


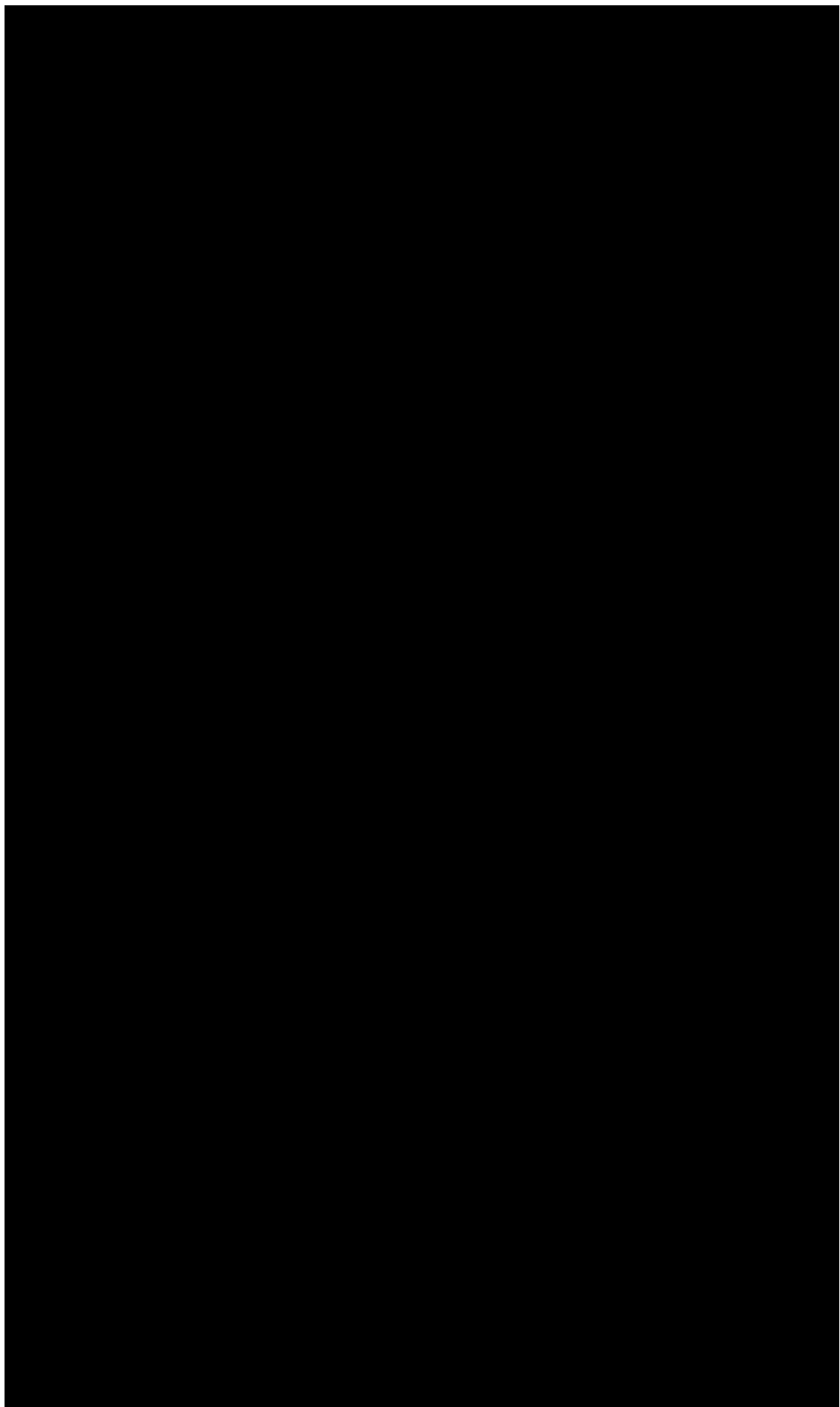










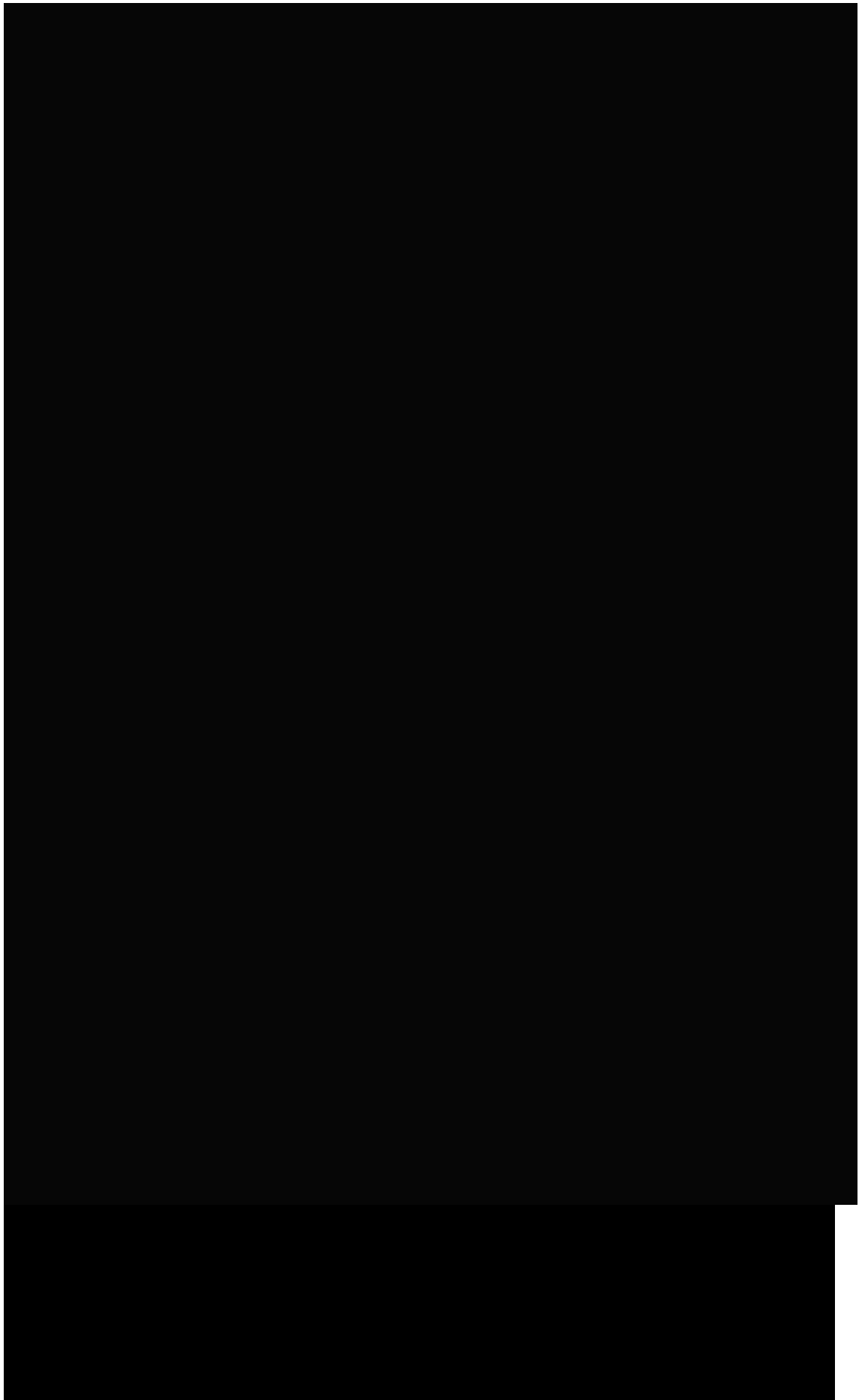


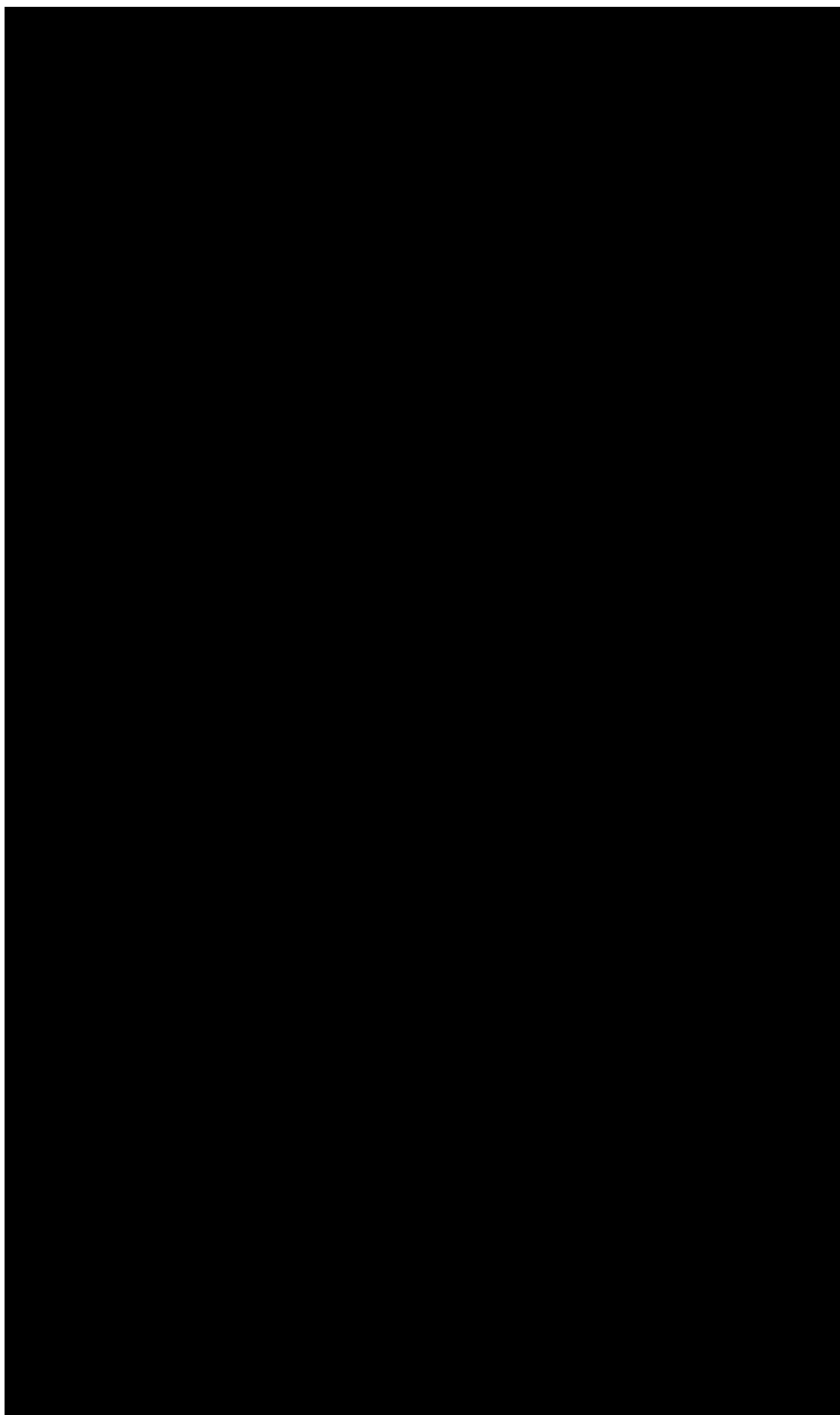
## PERSIMMONS AND CANDY













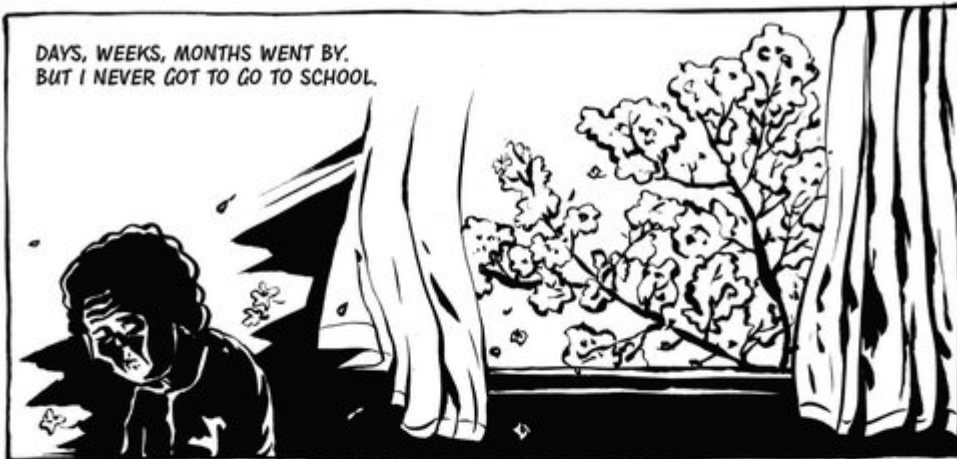
\*THE HOUSE OF SHARING IN GWANGJU, GYEONGGI PROVINCE, IS A NURSING HOME FOR SURVIVING COMFORT WOMEN. LOCATED ON THE GROUNDS IS A MEMORIAL HALL AND MUSEUM.







DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS WENT BY.  
BUT I NEVER GOT TO GO TO SCHOOL.



NO MATTER HOW MUCH I BEGGED AND CRIED,  
SHE WOULDN'T ALLOW IT.







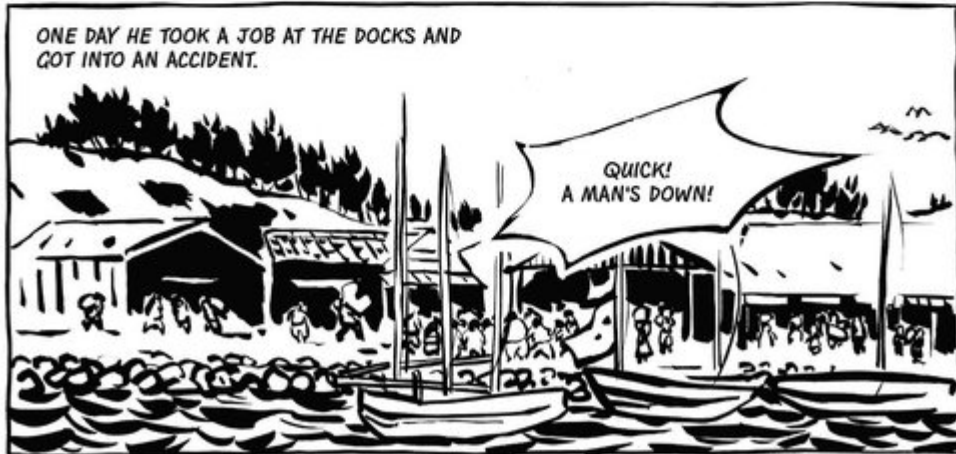
FATHER TOOK ANY JOB HE COULD FIND.  
HE FARMED OTHER PEOPLE'S LAND...



WORKED AT A COBBLER'S STALL, NOODLE FACTORY,  
AND EVEN AS A SERVANT.



ONE DAY HE TOOK A JOB AT THE DOCKS AND  
GOT INTO AN ACCIDENT.









BUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH. NO MATTER HOW HARD SHE WORKED,  
EVEN THE DAYS WE HAD PORRIDGE WERE RARE.



I TRIED TO HELP BY TAKING CARE OF  
THE LITTLE ONES...



BY GOING TO THE MARKET AND DOING THE  
LAUNDRY...



AND BY RUNNING ERRANDS AND  
EVEN FORAGING.



LET'S ASK MAMA  
TO MAKE SOME RICE  
CAKES WITH THIS.





SOMETIMES WE WERE SO HUNGRY WE  
PEELED THE BARK OFF PINE TREES

OKJA, SIT TIGHT WHILE  
I WORK, OKAY?

AND MADE PORRIDGE WITH IT.

YOU BETTER NOT EAT  
ANY OLD THING OFF  
THE GROUND!

WE WERE ALWAYS HUNGRY.

OW, MY  
HANDS.

WAA-AAH!

KECK  
KECK

WHAT DID  
YOU EAT?

SPIT IT OUT!  
SPIT IT OUT  
NOW!

GAG  
GAG





ONE DAY WHEN OUR SITUATION COULDN'T GET ANY WORSE, MAMA SENT ME TO THE NEXT VILLAGE WHERE MY GRANDMOTHER LIVED. SHE TOLD ME TO COME BACK WITH SOME FOOD NO MATTER WHAT.









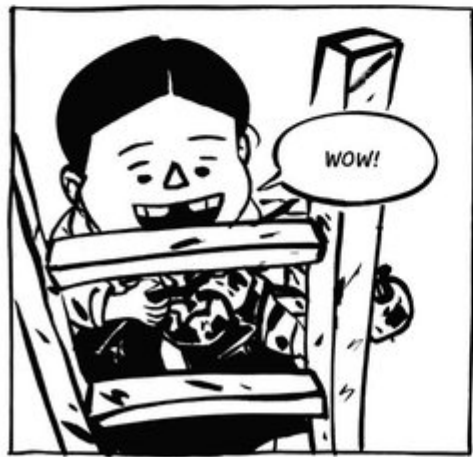
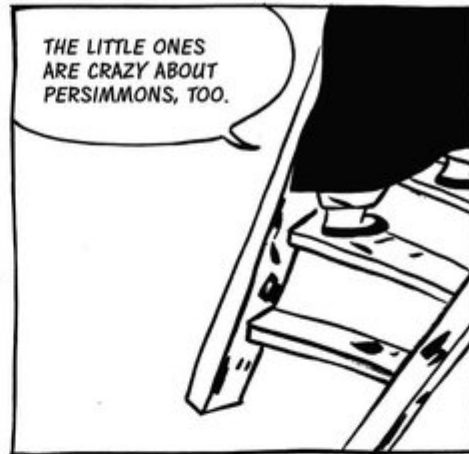














BOY, DID I CATCH IT FOR PICKING  
FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S TREE.





IN JULY, 1937, WAR BROKE OUT BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN.



IN AUGUST, JAPANESE TROOPS EASILY CAPTURED BEIPING (NOW BEIJING) AND TIANJIN...



AND BOASTED SHANGHAI WOULD FALL IN EIGHT DAYS.



BUT THEIR PREDICTION TURNED OUT TO BE WRONG.



THE BATTLE OF SHANGHAI DRAGGED ON FOR THREE MONTHS BECAUSE OF CHINA'S STAND.





IN NOVEMBER, AFTER A HARD-WON  
VICTORY IN SHANGHAI



THE JAPANESE TROOPS



MARCHED 300 KILOMETERS WESTWARD  
AT A BREAKNECK SPEED



TO THE "SOUTHERN CAPITAL": NANJING.



ALONG THE WAY



THEY SET FIRE TO ALL THE VILLAGES  
THEY PASSED







AND RAPED AND MURDERED COUNTLESS CIVILIANS.



ON DECEMBER 13, 1937



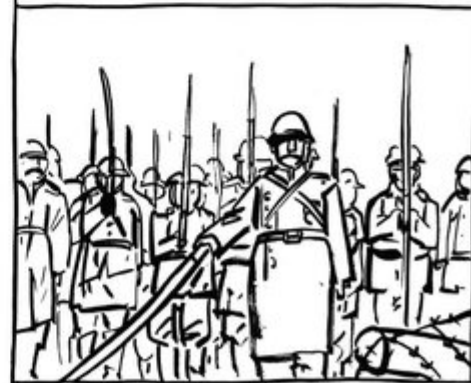
THE SAME YEAR GRANNY LEE OK-SUN WAS  
PUNISHED FOR STEALING A PERSIMMON...



THE JAPANESE ARMY INVADIED NANJING



AND STORMED THE CITY'S FORTIFIED WALLS.





TANG SHENGZHI, THE CHINESE COMMANDER IN CHARGE OF DEFENDING NANJING, FLED THE CITY.



A HORRIBLE FATE AWAITED THOSE WHO WERE UNABLE TO ESCAPE.



CHINESE P.O.W.S AND CIVILIANS WERE GUNNED DOWN EN MASSE AND BECAME THE VICTIMS OF BAYONET PRACTICE AND A SWORD-KILLING COMPETITION.



IN ORDER TO SAVE AMMUNITION, JAPANESE SOLDIERS BURIED PEOPLE ALIVE OR MUTILATED THEM WITH BAYONETS.



AT ONE EXECUTION SITE, OVER A THOUSAND CIVILIANS WERE LINED UP, DOUSED WITH GASOLINE, AND SET ON FIRE.



AMONG THEM WERE COUNTLESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN.





AFTER WORLD WAR II, THE WARTIME DIARY OF  
A JAPANESE SOLDIER WAS FOUND.



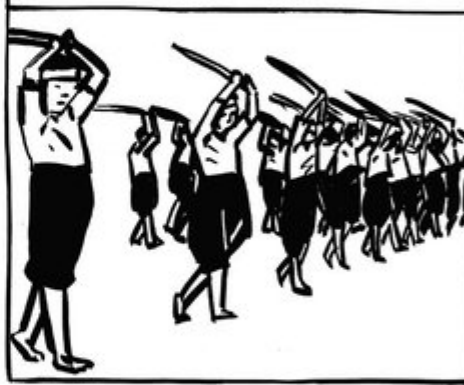
HE DESCRIBED BURYING PEOPLE ALIVE



SETTING THEM ON FIRE



AND BEATING THEM TO DEATH.



WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE RAPED.



MANY WERE EVEN GANG-RAPED AND THEN  
KILLED.





IT DIDN'T MATTER IF THEY WERE UNDER THE AGE OF TEN OR OVER THE AGE OF SEVENTY.



THE DEATH TOLL OF THE SIX-WEEK-LONG NANJING MASSACRE IS ESTIMATED TO BE AROUND 300,000.



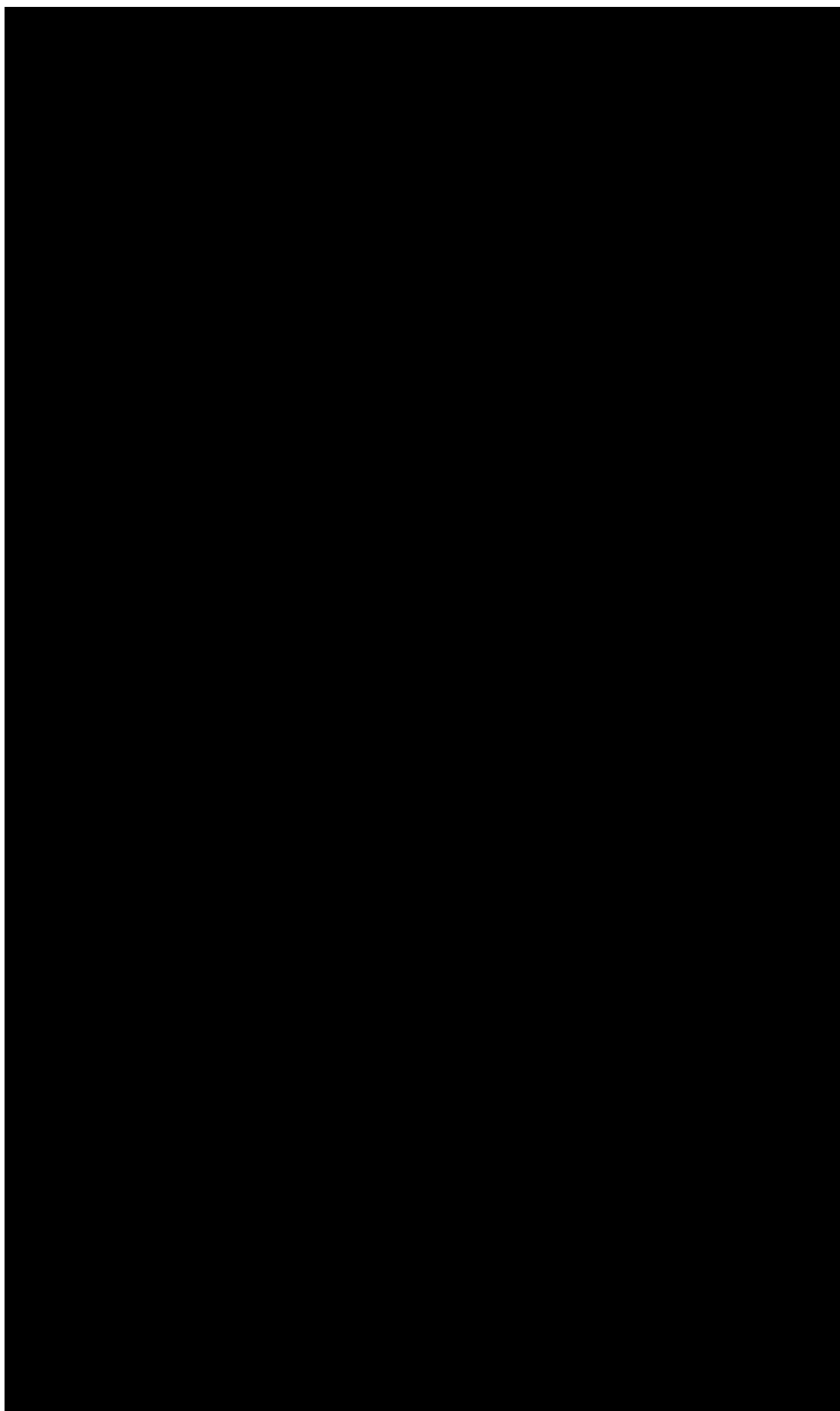








SO YOUR MOTHER  
PUNISHED YOU FOR EATING  
THE PERSIMMON?







IT WAS JANUARY, SO...

DANG, THIS  
CANDY'S SO  
GOOD.



OH, MY HANDS  
ARE FREEZING.

WHY ARE  
YOU SPITTING IT  
OUT THEN?



I'M SAVING IT  
FOR LATER.



EW, GROSS.



IT'S THAT GOOD?

COME ON,  
LEMME HAVE  
A TASTE.

DIDN'T YOU  
JUST SAY IT  
WAS GROSS?

WHAT'S  
THIS?









\*THE JEON IS NO LONGER USED TODAY, BUT AT THE TIME, 5 JEON WOULD HAVE EQUALED ABOUT \$2-3 USD.



I HURRIED HOME AS HAPPY AS COULD BE, BUT WHEN I GOT THERE...



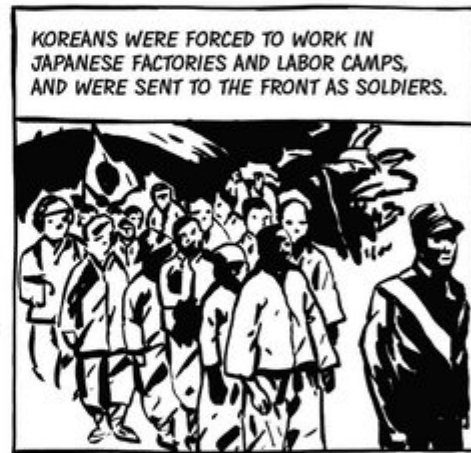
ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE. SHE PROBABLY SAW THE CANDY BAG AND ASSUMED I'D BOUGHT IT WITH STOLEN MONEY.



NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I SAID I'D FOUND THE MONEY ON THE STREET, SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE ME. SHE DRAGGED ME TO THE KITCHEN AND BEAT ME TILL I WAS BLACK AND BLUE. THAT'S HOW I GOT THE SCAR ON MY HAND.









JAPAN WANTED TO WIPE OUT KOREAN IDENTITY AND TRADITION. WORSHIP AT SHINTO SHRINES BECAME MANDATORY.



THERE WERE 1,141 SHINTO SHRINES IN KOREA UNTIL ITS LIBERATION IN 1945.

FROM 1940, KOREANS WERE FORCED TO ADOPT JAPANESE NAMES.



IF YOU REFUSED TO COMPLY, YOU COULDN'T GET RATION CARDS



AND WERE THE FIRST TO BE SENT AWAY TO LABOR CAMPS.



WITHOUT A JAPANESE NAME



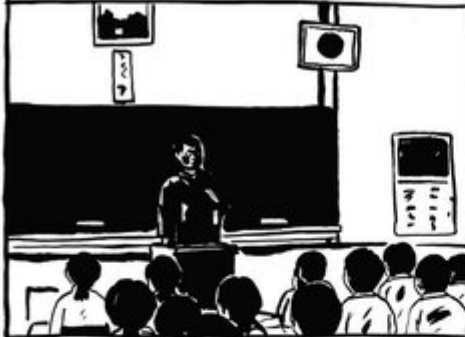
YOU COULDN'T ATTEND SCHOOL.







STUDENTS WERE FORCED TO SPEAK ONLY JAPANESE AND WERE ENCOURAGED TO WATCH ONE ANOTHER TO ENSURE KOREAN WASN'T USED.



AND IF ANYONE WAS CAUGHT USING KOREAN



THAT STUDENT WAS PUNISHED BY THE TEACHER



AND WOULDN'T RECEIVE SUPPLIES LIKE NOTEBOOKS.



CHALKBOARDS WERE FILLED WITH QUESTIONS LIKE "WHY IS JAPAN AT WAR?" AND "WHEN YOU'RE PERFORMING THE EMPEROR BOW," WHAT POSTURE SHOULD YOUR HEART ASSUME?"



THE KOREAN LEAGUE FOR NATIONAL MOBILIZATION WAS ESTABLISHED AND JAPANESE PROPAGANDA COVERED EVERY STREET.



\*PEOPLE WERE INSTRUCTED TO BOW IN THE DIRECTION OF JAPAN'S IMPERIAL PALACE WHERE THE EMPEROR RESIDED.







I TOOK AFTER MY MOTHER IN HEIGHT  
AND MY FATHER IN LOOKS.



ISN'T THAT THE FUNNIEST  
THING? I GOT ONLY THEIR  
UGLIEST FEATURES.

HEE  
HEE  
HEE



ME TOO! IF I TOOK AFTER  
MY DAD, I'D HAVE ENDED  
UP WITH BIG EYES AND  
DOUBLE EYELIDS!

HA  
HA  
HA

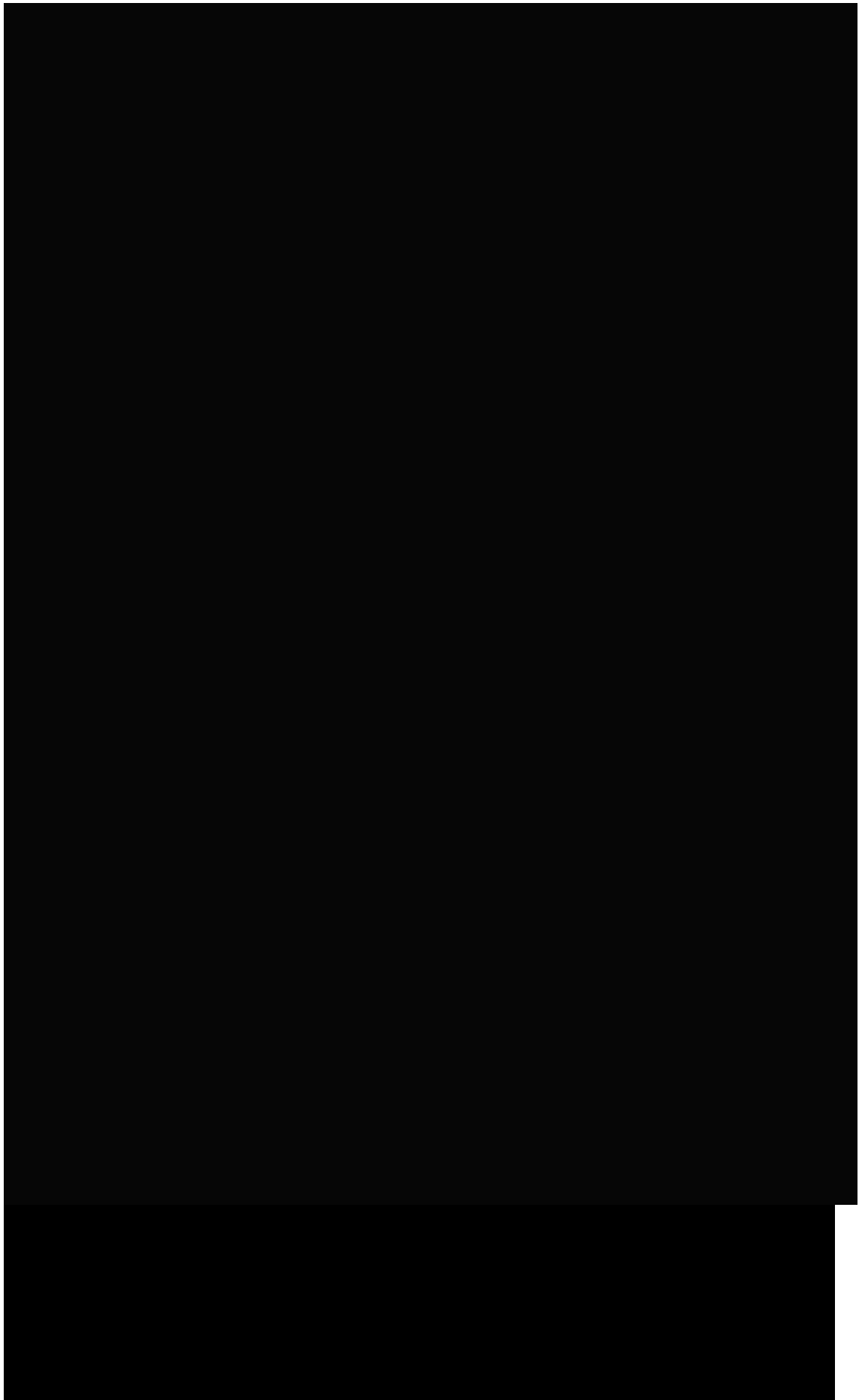


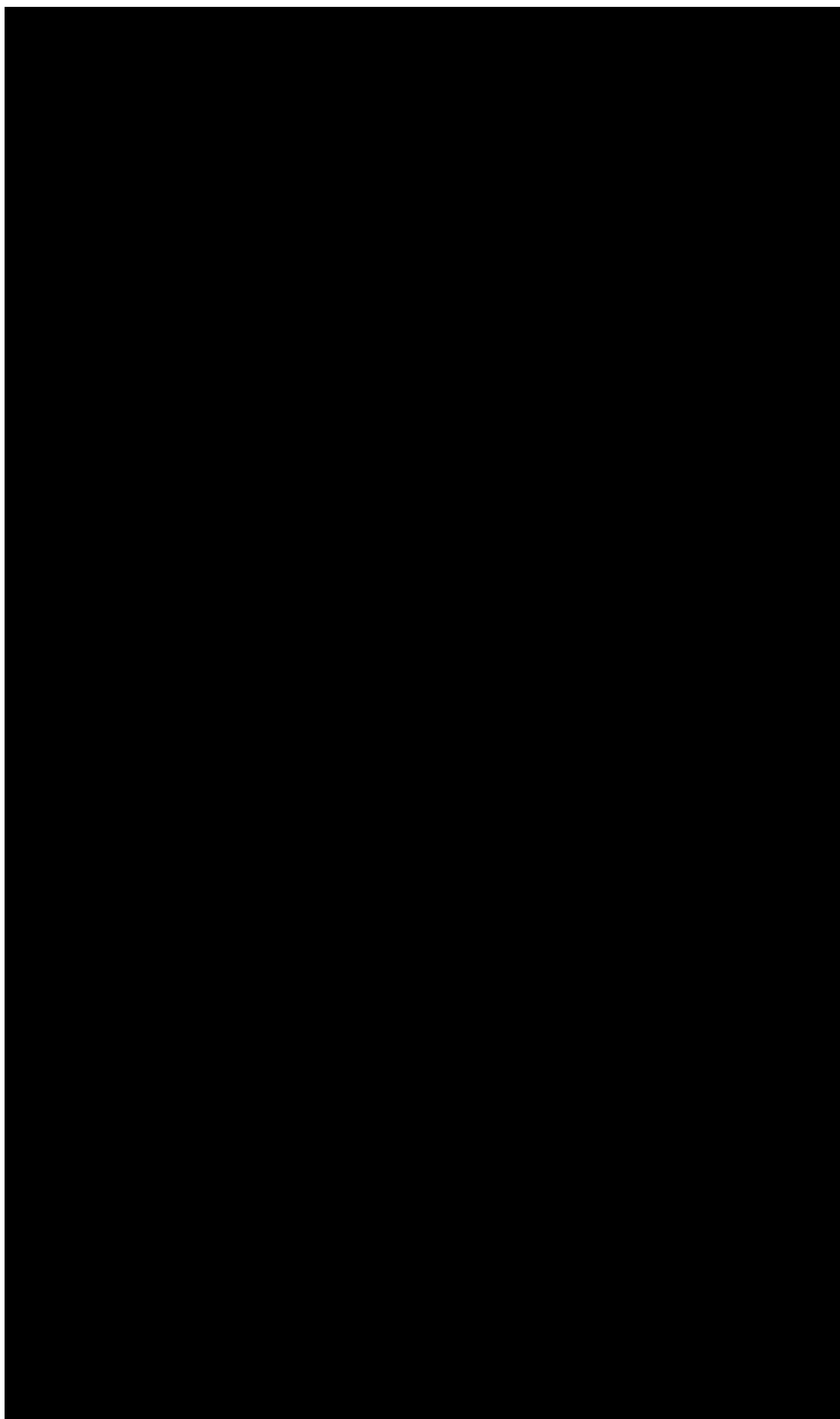








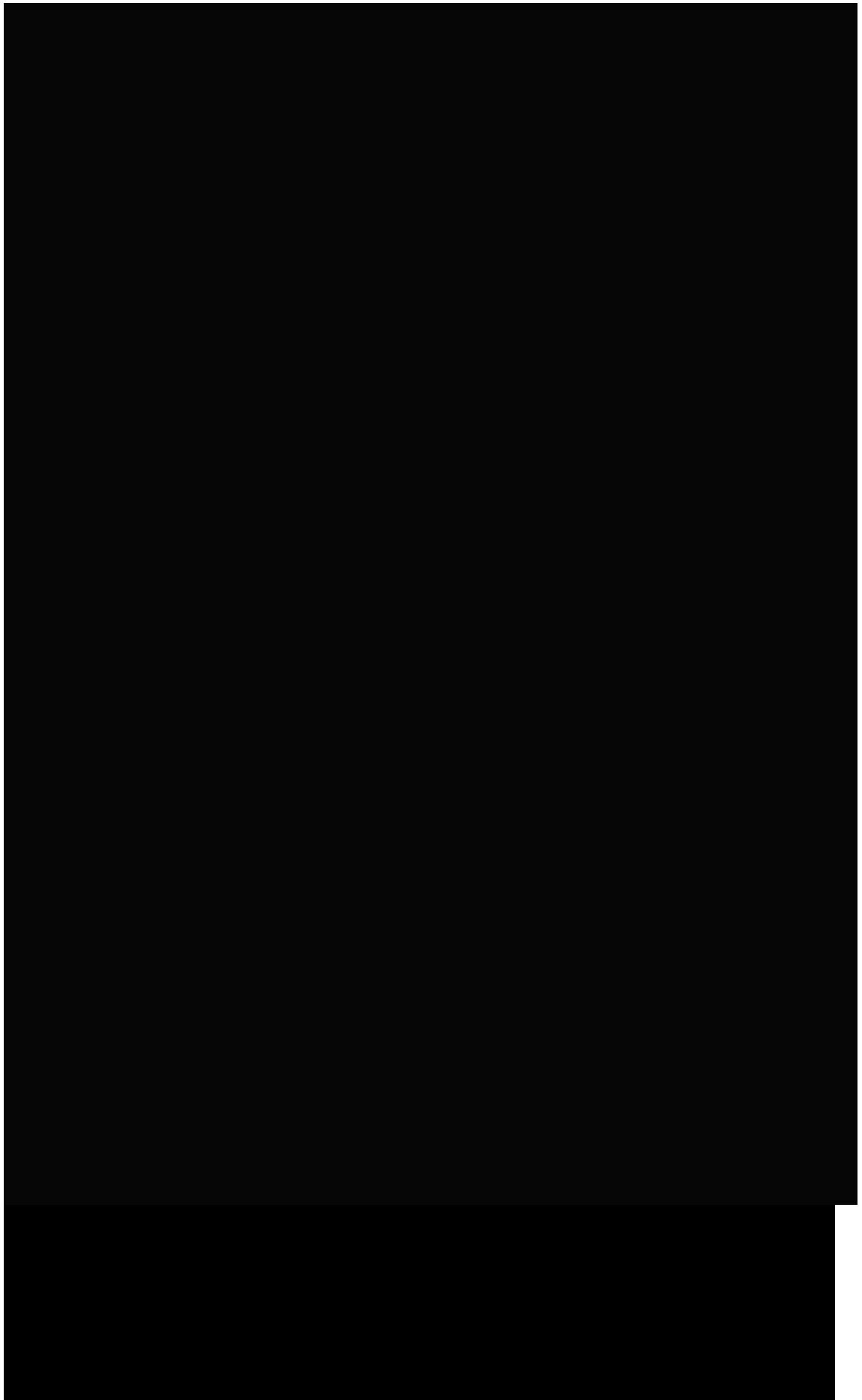


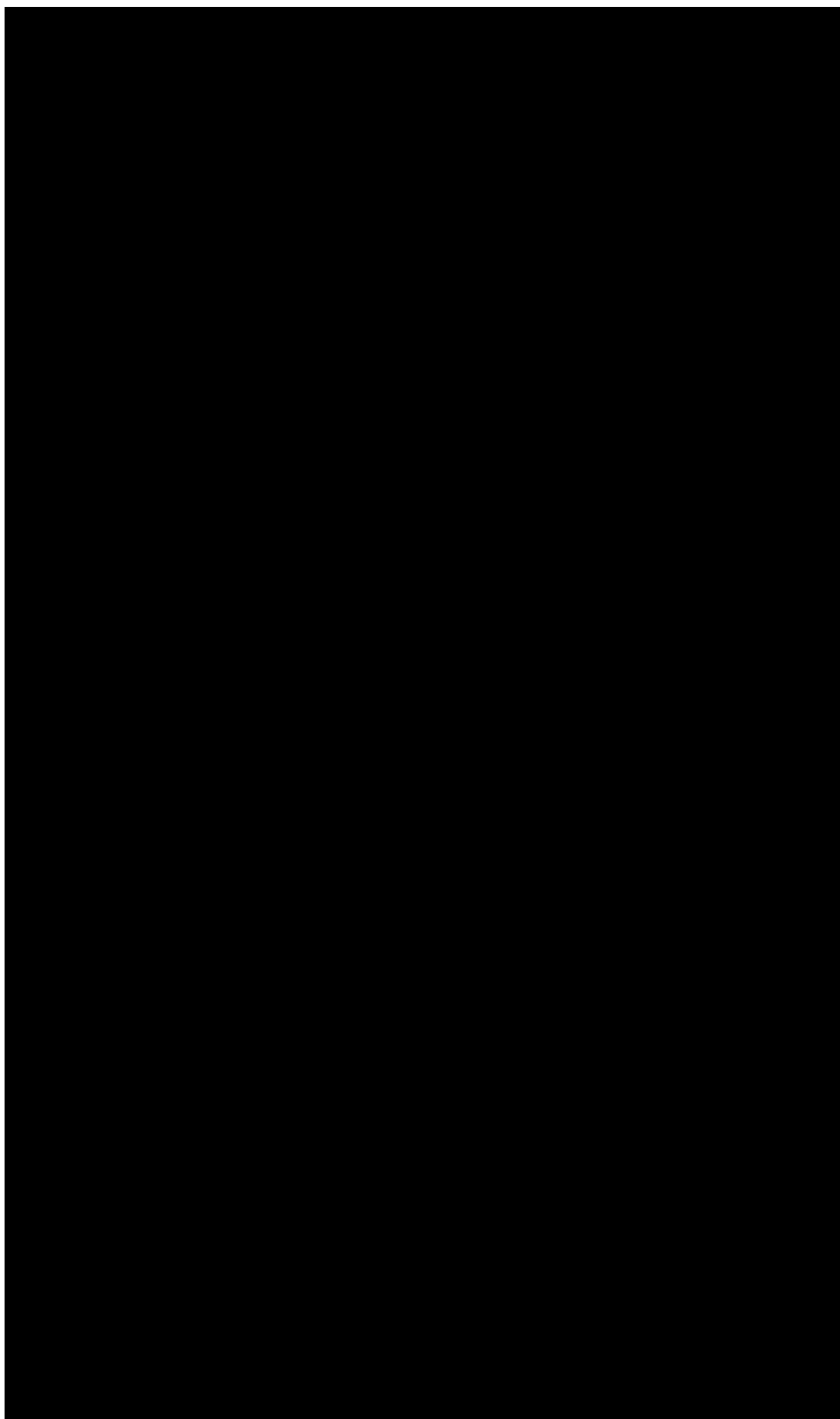


## ADOPTION









ONE DAY A STRANGER CAME  
TO OUR HOUSE.







HE LOOKED LIKE HE WAS  
IN HIS MID-FORTIES.



MY DAD DIDN'T SEEM TOO HAPPY.

GOODBYE  
THEN.

ALRIGHTY, I'LL  
BE IN TOUCH.



AND MOM WAS WALKING  
ON EGGSHELLS.

ISN'T IT  
A GOOD THING SHE  
WON'T STARVE?



I HAD NO IDEA WHAT THEY WERE  
TALKING ABOUT

SIS, CAN YOU  
MAKE A NOSE FOR  
THE SNOWMAN?

SURE.



SINCE I WAS BUSY LOOKING AFTER MY SISTERS.

FIRST YOU  
MAKE THE EYES  
AND THEN  
THE NOSE.

THEN  
THE ARMS

IT'LL BE BETTER  
FOR HER.

GEE, THERE'S  
NOTHING YOU  
CAN'T DO!

















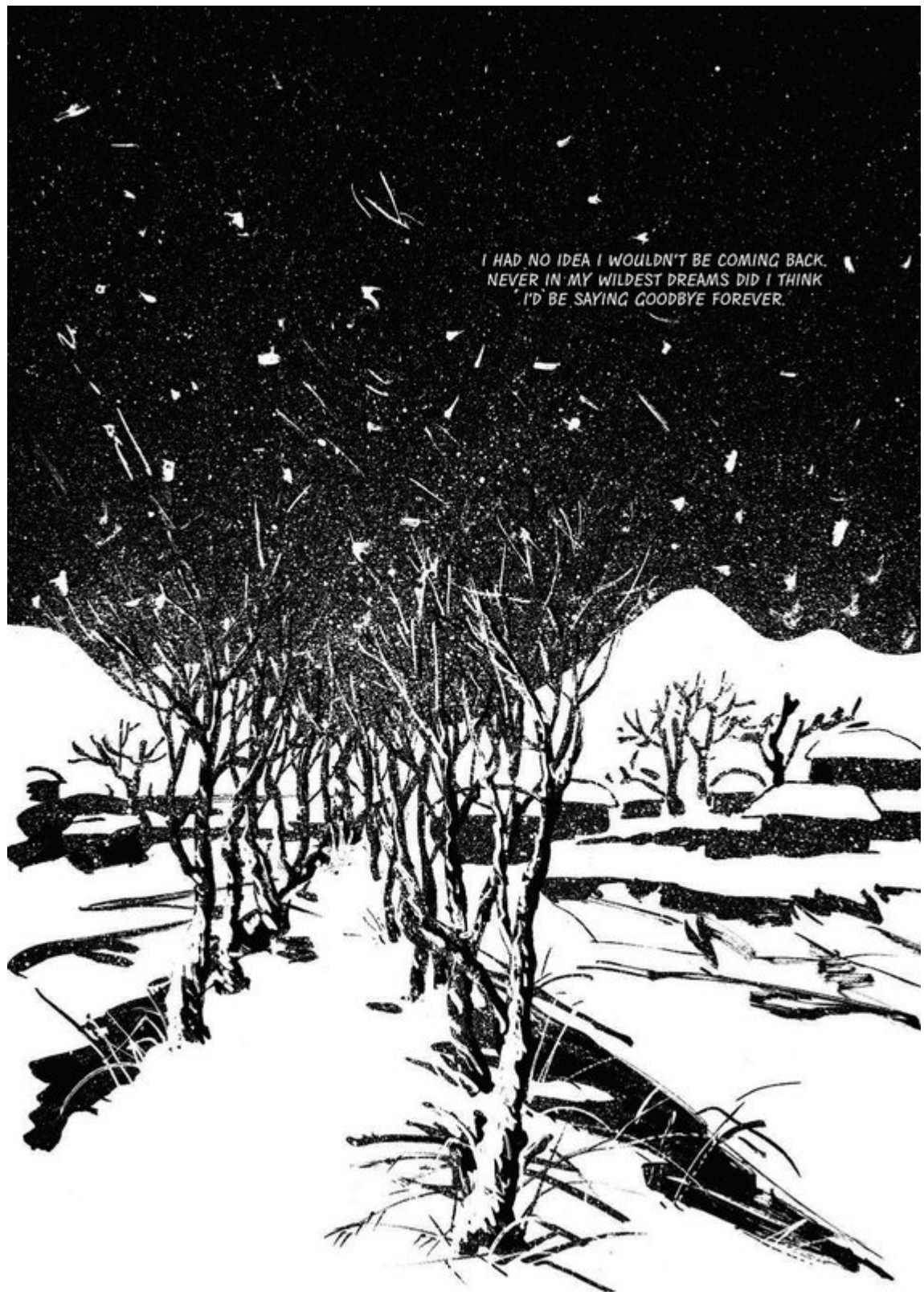


I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID YES.





I HAD NO IDEA I WOULDN'T BE COMING BACK.  
NEVER IN MY WILDEST DREAMS DID I THINK  
I'D BE SAYING GOODBYE FOREVER.























I COULDN'T SLEEP THAT NIGHT.



I WAS LEAVING IN THE MORNING.



I DIDN'T HAVE TO GO HUNGRY ANYMORE





AND I DIDN'T HAVE TO LOOK AFTER MY SIBLINGS.



CLEVER OKHUI, CRYBABY OKJA, AND BABY BYEONGYUN, WHO ALWAYS WANTS TO BE CARRIED ON MY BACK.



I'M SORRY I GOT ANGRY AT YOU SOMETIMES.  
I'M GONNA MISS YOU GUYS.





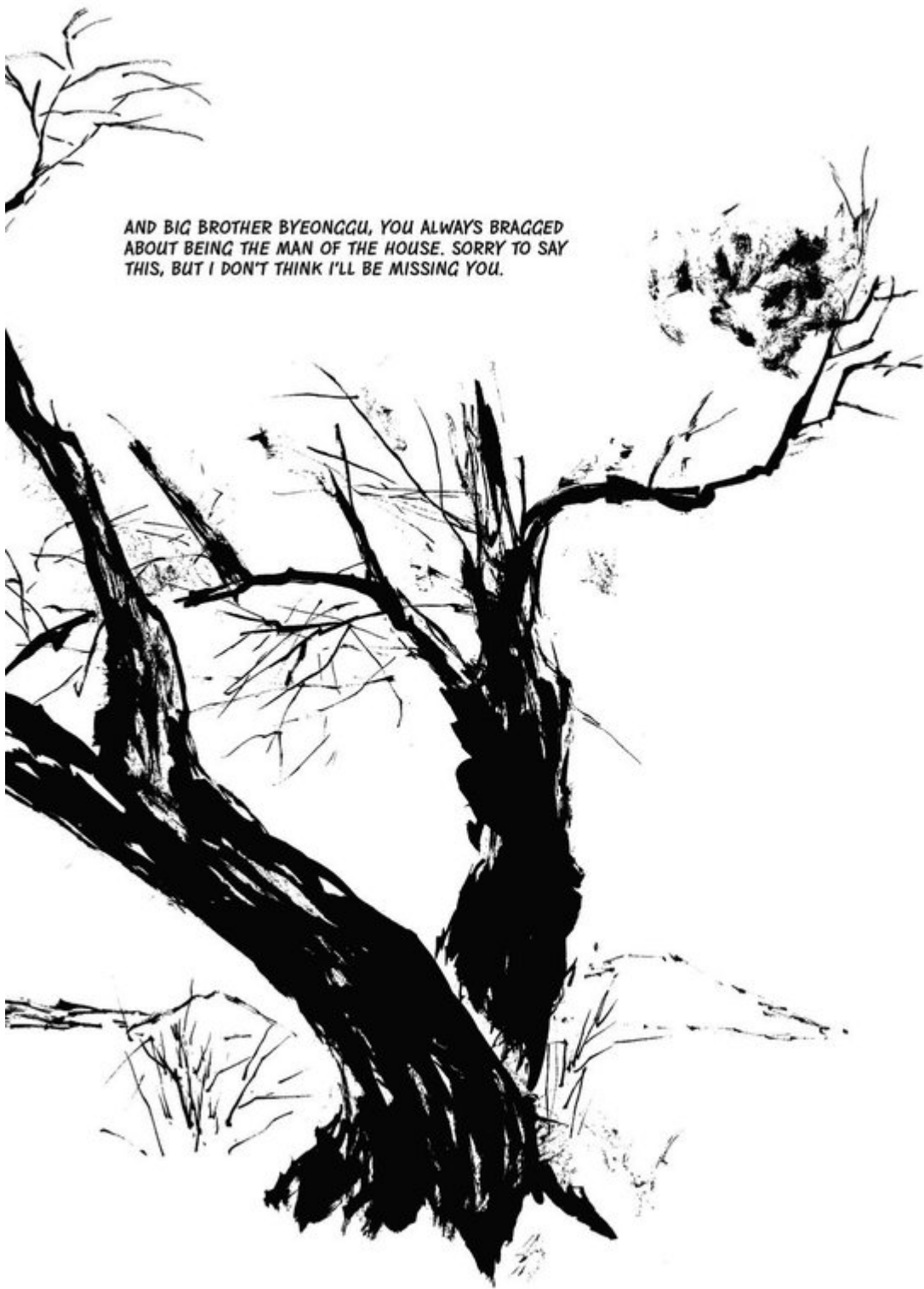


BUT I'LL PROBABLY MISS OUR BABY  
BYEONGYUN THE MOST.

OH, MY DARLINGS, DON'T FIGHT AND BE GOOD TO ONE ANOTHER.  
I'LL BRING BACK LOTS OF YUMMY TREATS.





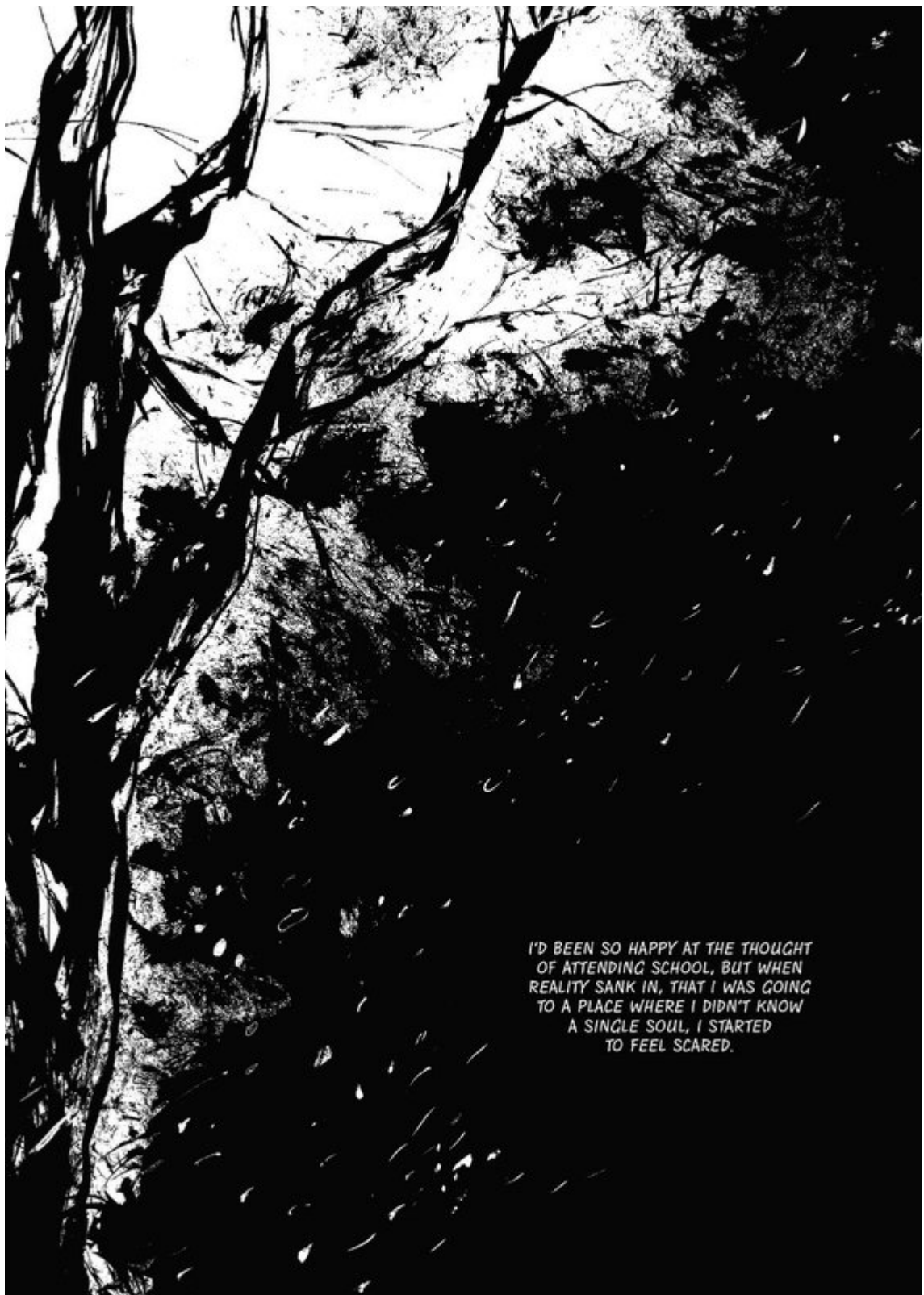
A black and white ink-style illustration of a gnarled tree. The tree has a thick, textured trunk that splits into several branches. One branch extends upwards and to the right, ending in a cup-shaped bird's nest filled with small, dark, textured shapes representing eggs or young birds. Another branch extends to the left. The background is plain white, and there are some faint, sketchy lines suggesting grass or other vegetation at the base of the tree.

AND BIG BROTHER BYEONGGU, YOU ALWAYS BRAGGED  
ABOUT BEING THE MAN OF THE HOUSE. SORRY TO SAY  
THIS, BUT I DON'T THINK I'LL BE MISSING YOU.









I'D BEEN SO HAPPY AT THE THOUGHT  
OF ATTENDING SCHOOL, BUT WHEN  
REALITY SANK IN, THAT I WAS GOING  
TO A PLACE WHERE I DIDN'T KNOW  
A SINGLE SOUL, I STARTED  
TO FEEL SCARED.













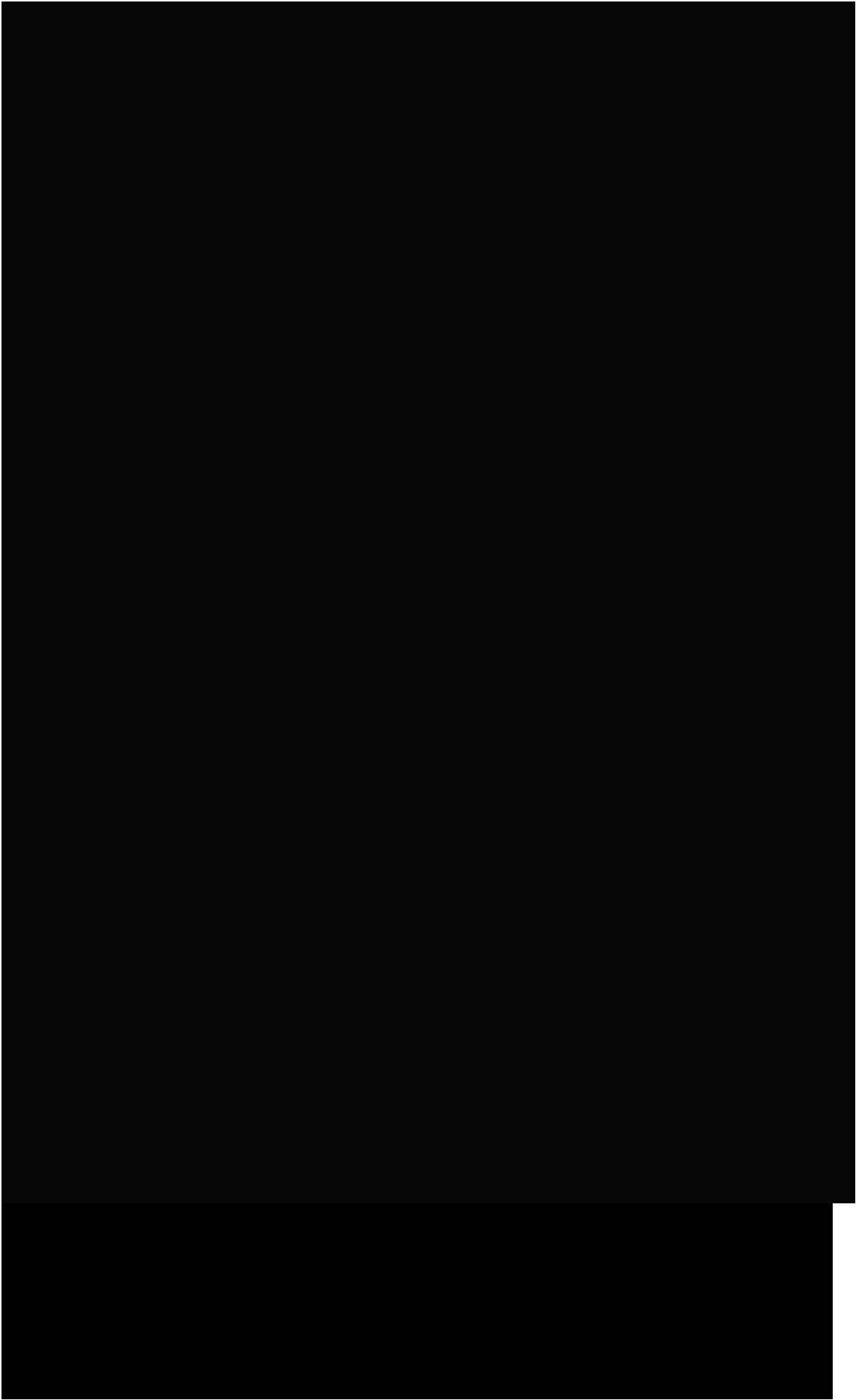


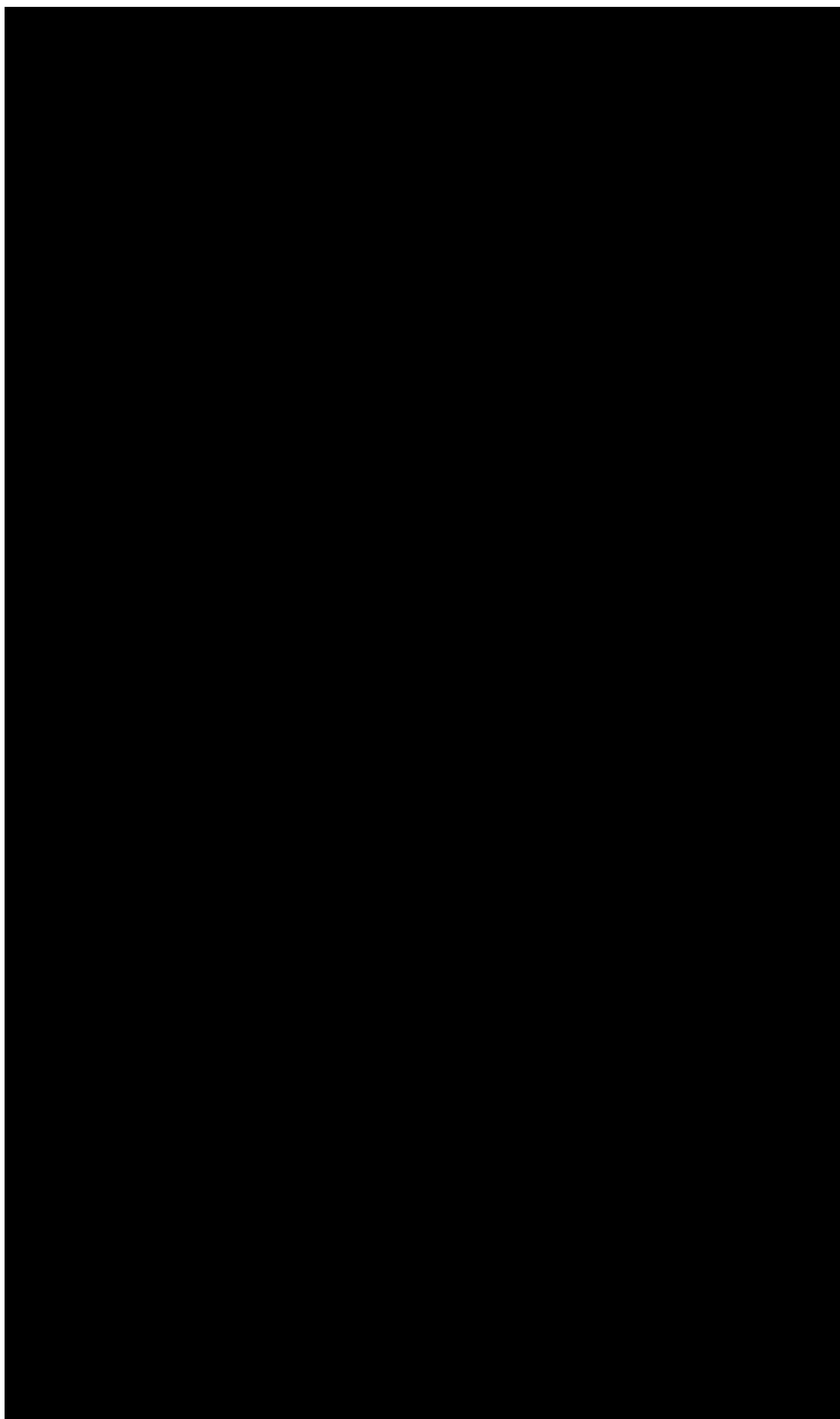








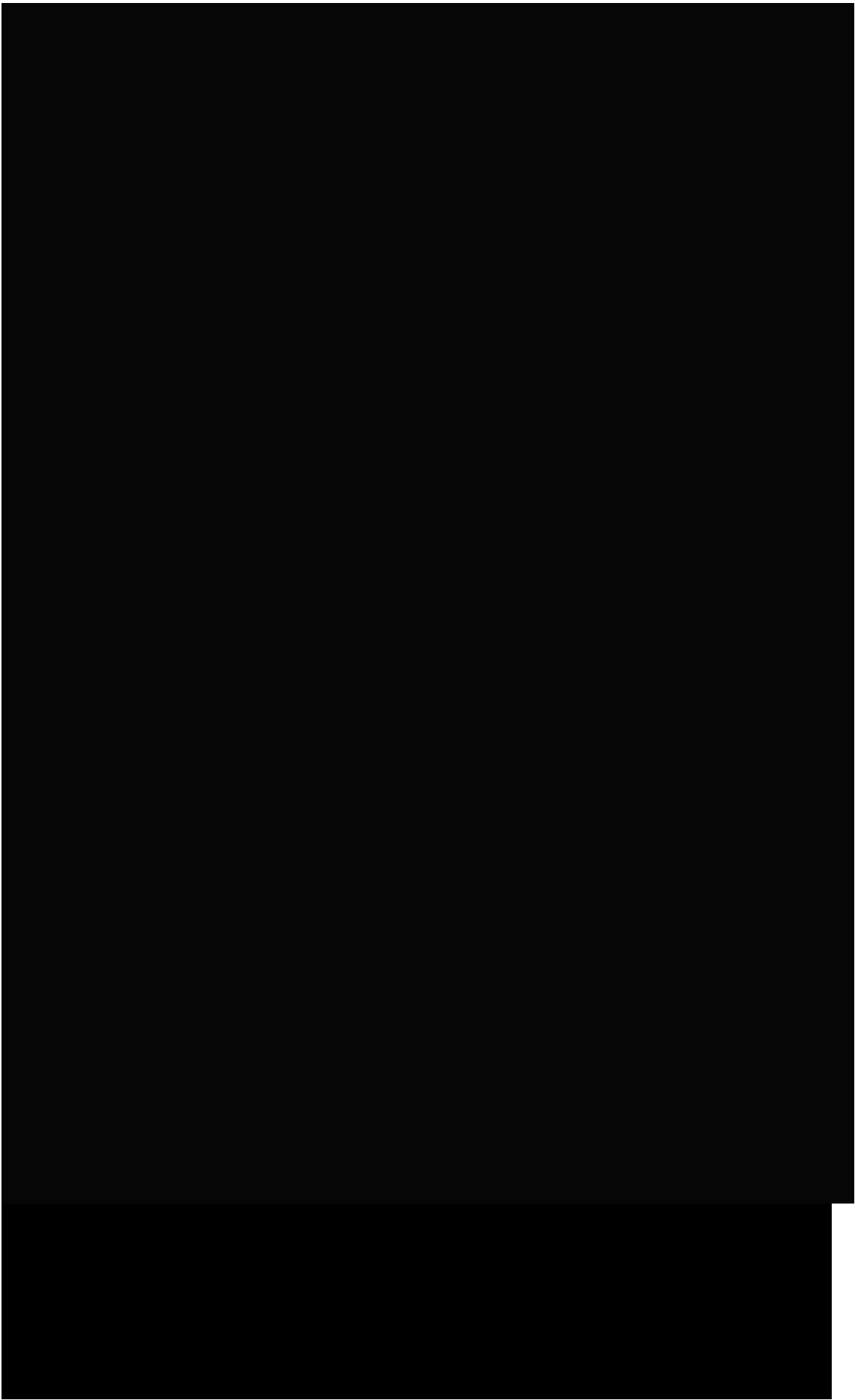


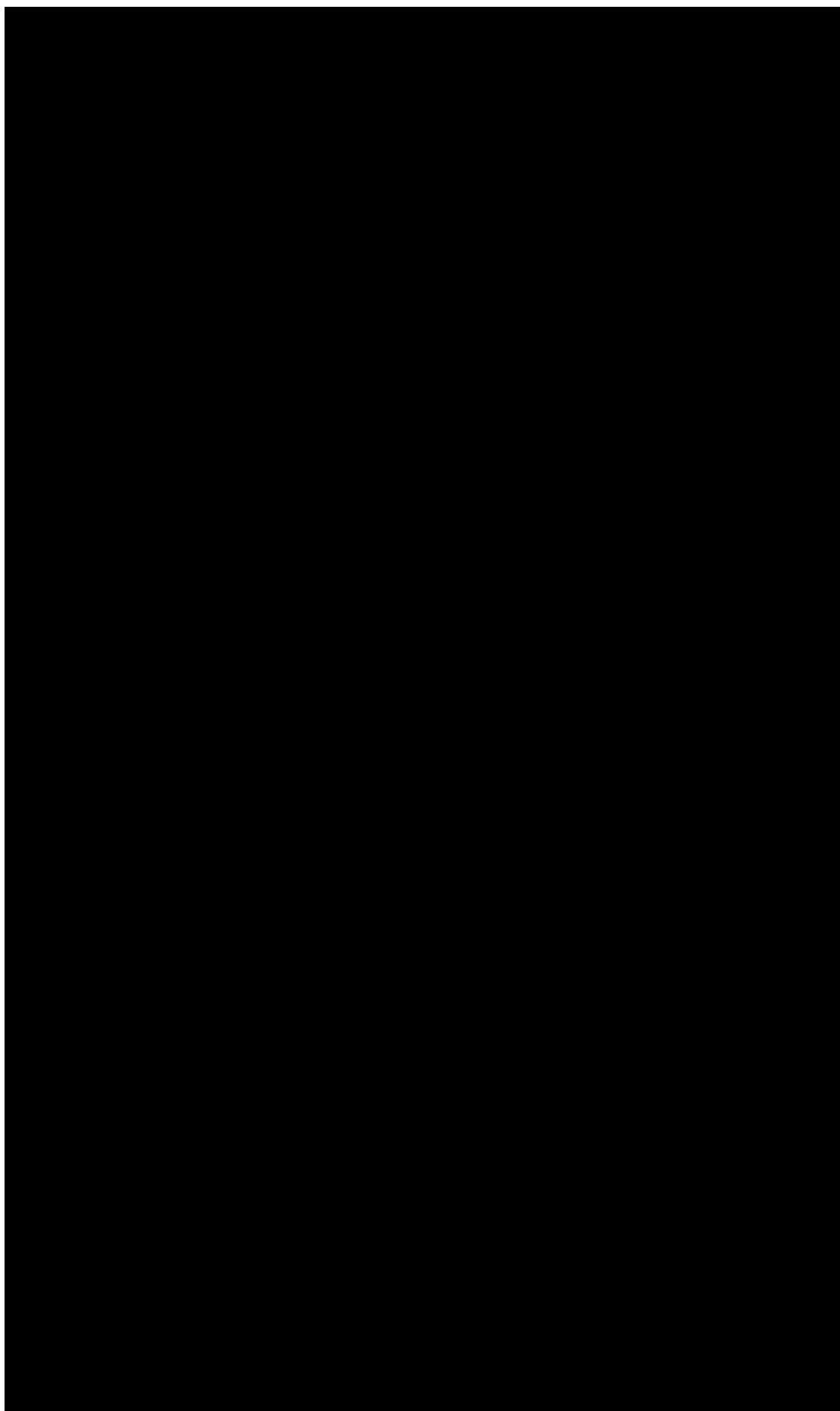


## BUSAN UDON SHOP





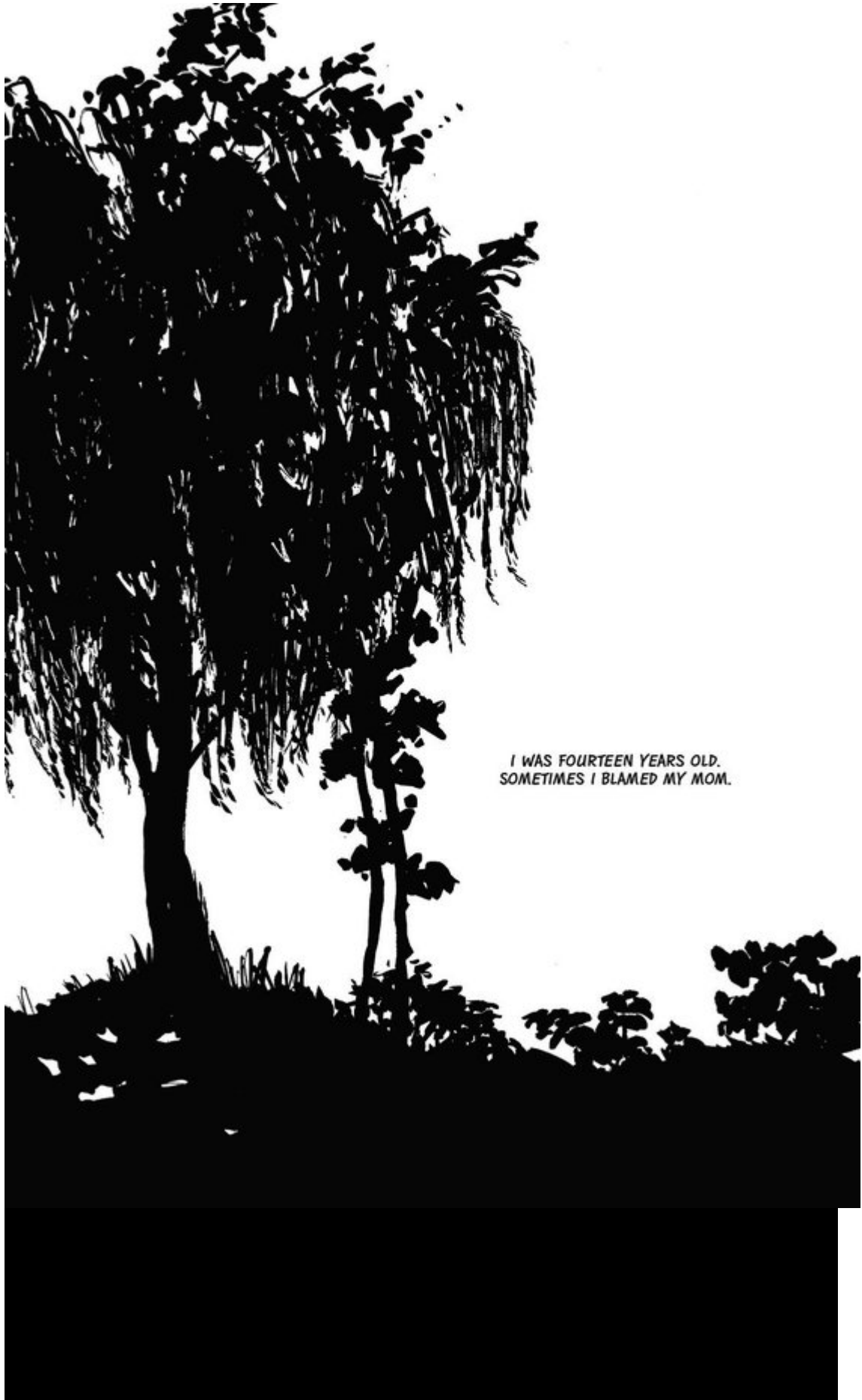




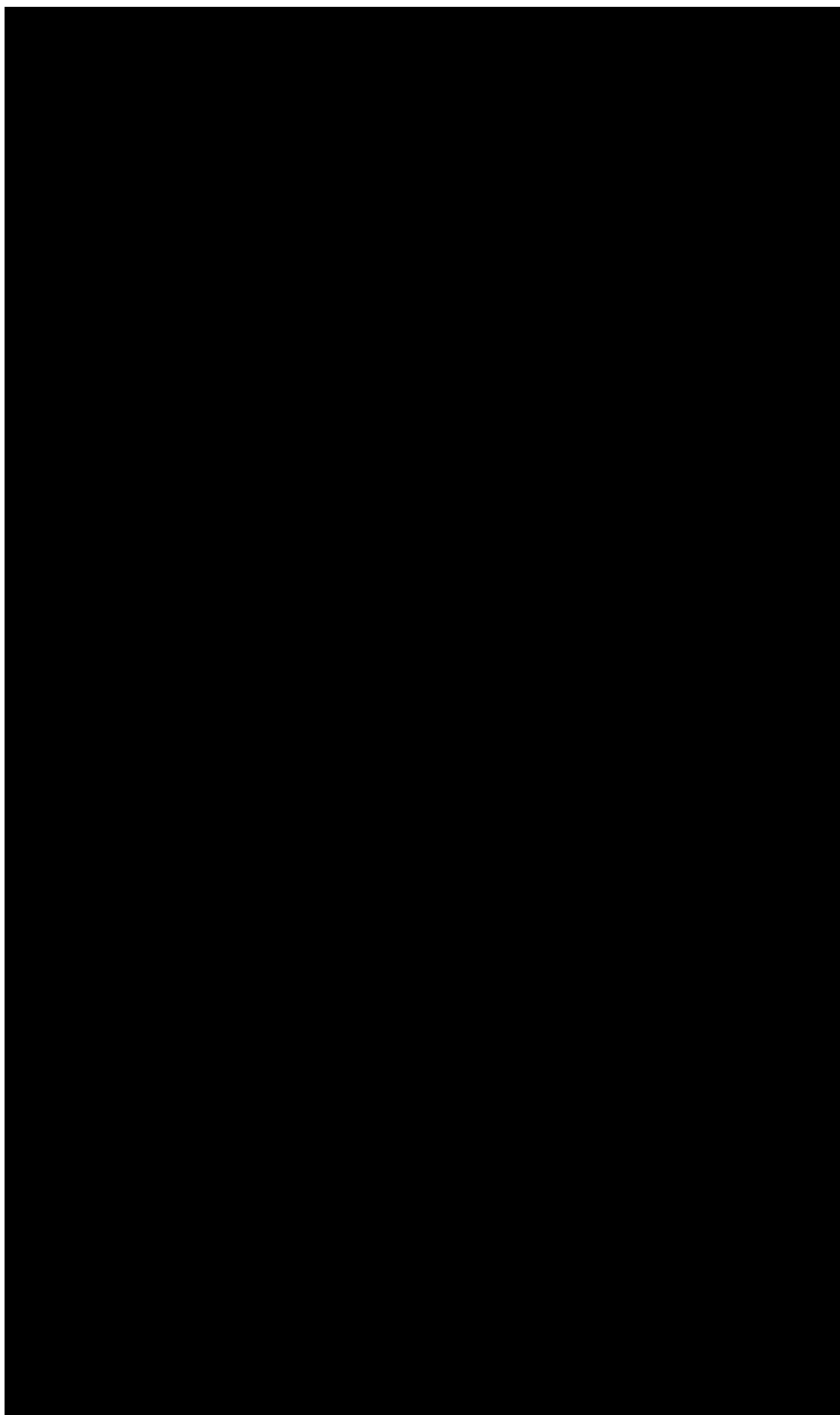






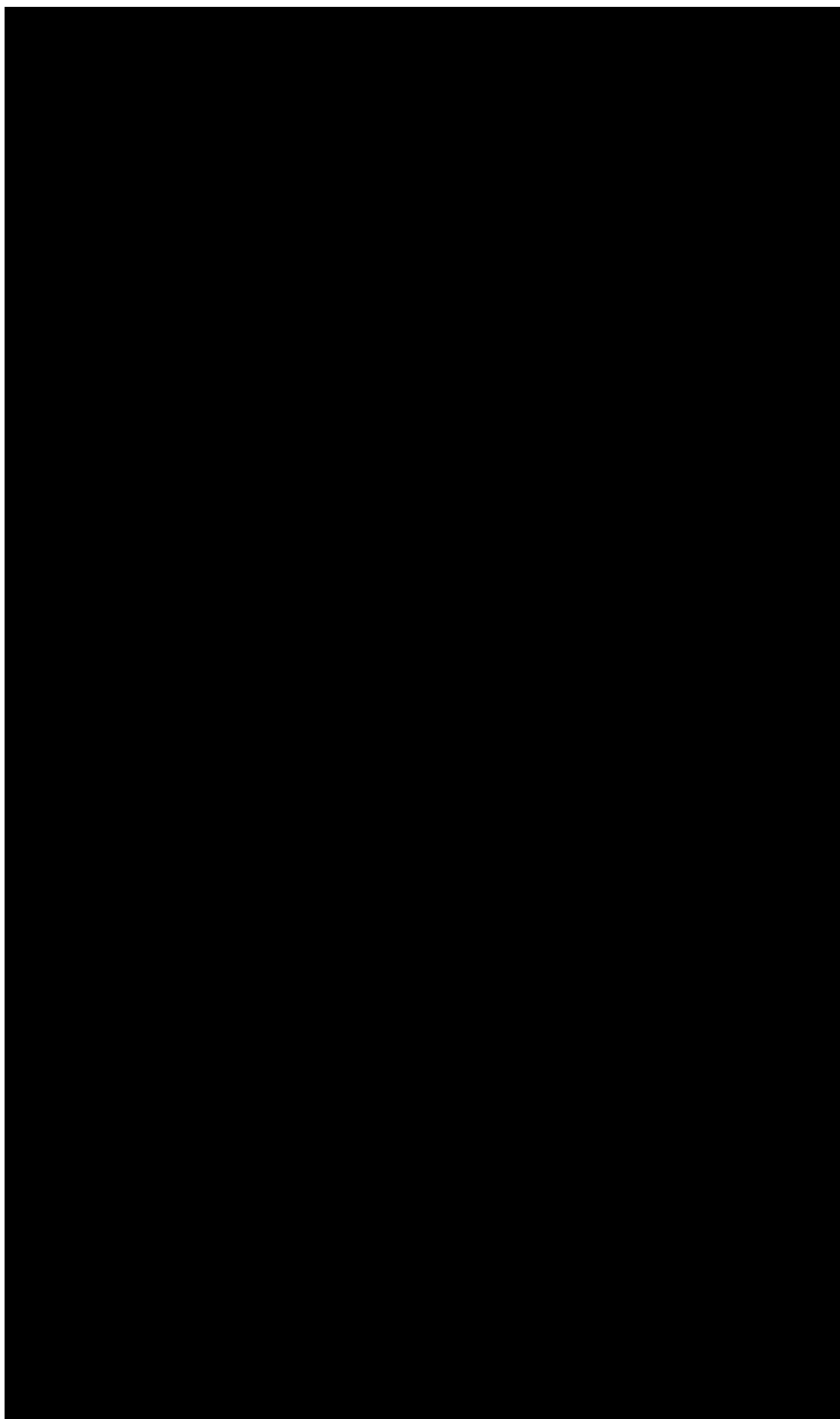


I WAS FOURTEEN YEARS OLD.  
SOMETIMES I BLAMED MY MOM.



IF SHE HAD SENT ME TO SCHOOL,  
I WOULD HAVE NEVER LEFT.





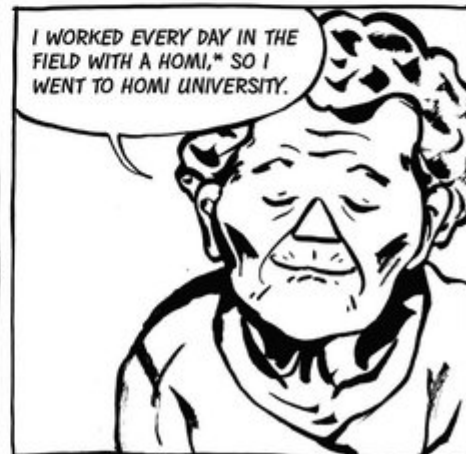
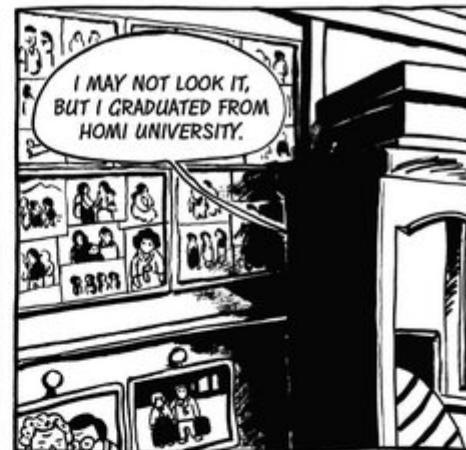
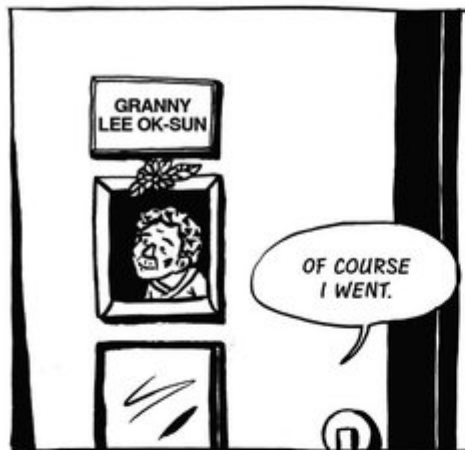
MAYBE I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HAVE A NORMAL LIFE LIKE OTHER GIRLS.



WHAT HAPPENED?  
YOU MEAN YOU DIDN'T  
END UP GOING TO SCHOOL?







\*THE HOMI IS A VERSATILE HAND HOE USED EXTENSIVELY IN KOREA FOR PLOWING, PLANTING, AND DIGGING.











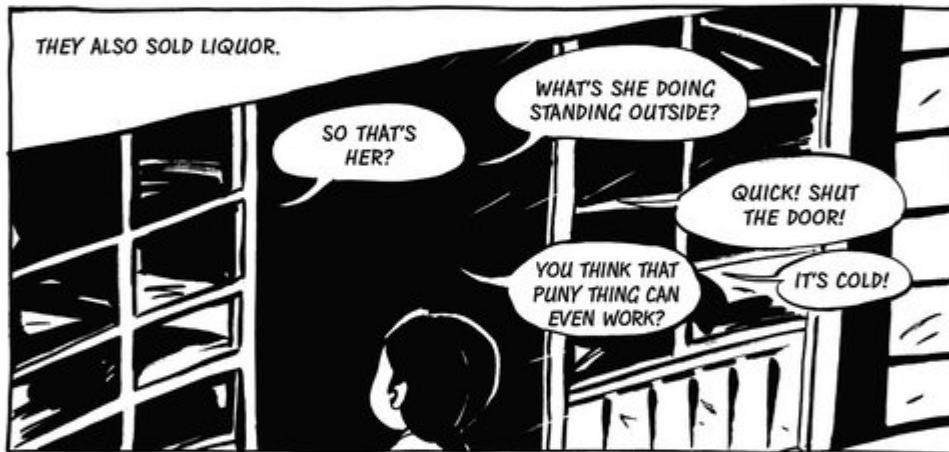




CRIPES,  
IT'S COLD!

FINALLY,  
YOU'RE BACK.

WE WALKED THROUGH THE SNOW FOR HOURS. IT WAS A NOODLE SHOP ALL RIGHT.



THEY ALSO SOLD LIQUOR.

SO THAT'S  
HER?

WHAT'S SHE DOING  
STANDING OUTSIDE?

QUICK! SHUT  
THE DOOR!

YOU THINK THAT  
PUNY THING CAN  
EVEN WORK?

IT'S COLD!



THEY'D TRICKED  
MY MOM.

BUT HOW COULD  
GRANNY'S MOTHER  
NOT HAVE KNOWN?

ANOTHER DRINK  
HERE!



IN GRANNY KIM SOON-OK'S CASE, DIDN'T SHE TESTIFY IT WAS HER OWN FATHER WHO HAD SOLD HER?"



THEY JUST WANTED TO MAKE MONEY OFF ME.



WERE THE OWNERS JAPANESE?

DID THEY HAVE ANY KIDS?

BE STRONG!



NO KIDS.



BOTH WERE KOREAN.



I HAD TO COOK FROM THE MOMENT I ARRIVED.



"KIM SOON-OK WAS BORN IN PYEONGYANG IN 1922. IN 1940, SHE WAS TAKEN TO HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA, WHERE SHE WAS FORCED TO SERVE AS A "COMFORT WOMAN."





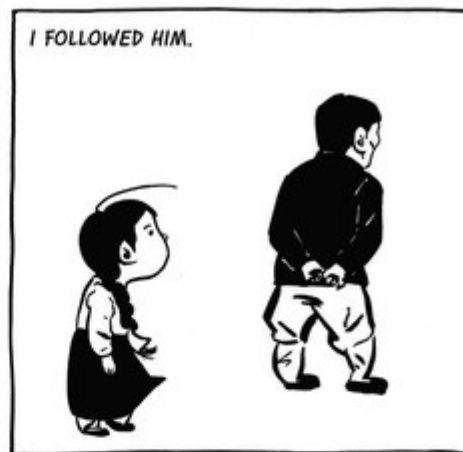
I DID EVERYTHING. COOKING, CLEANING, LAUNDRY.



AT FIRST I JUST ASSUMED THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH WORKERS.









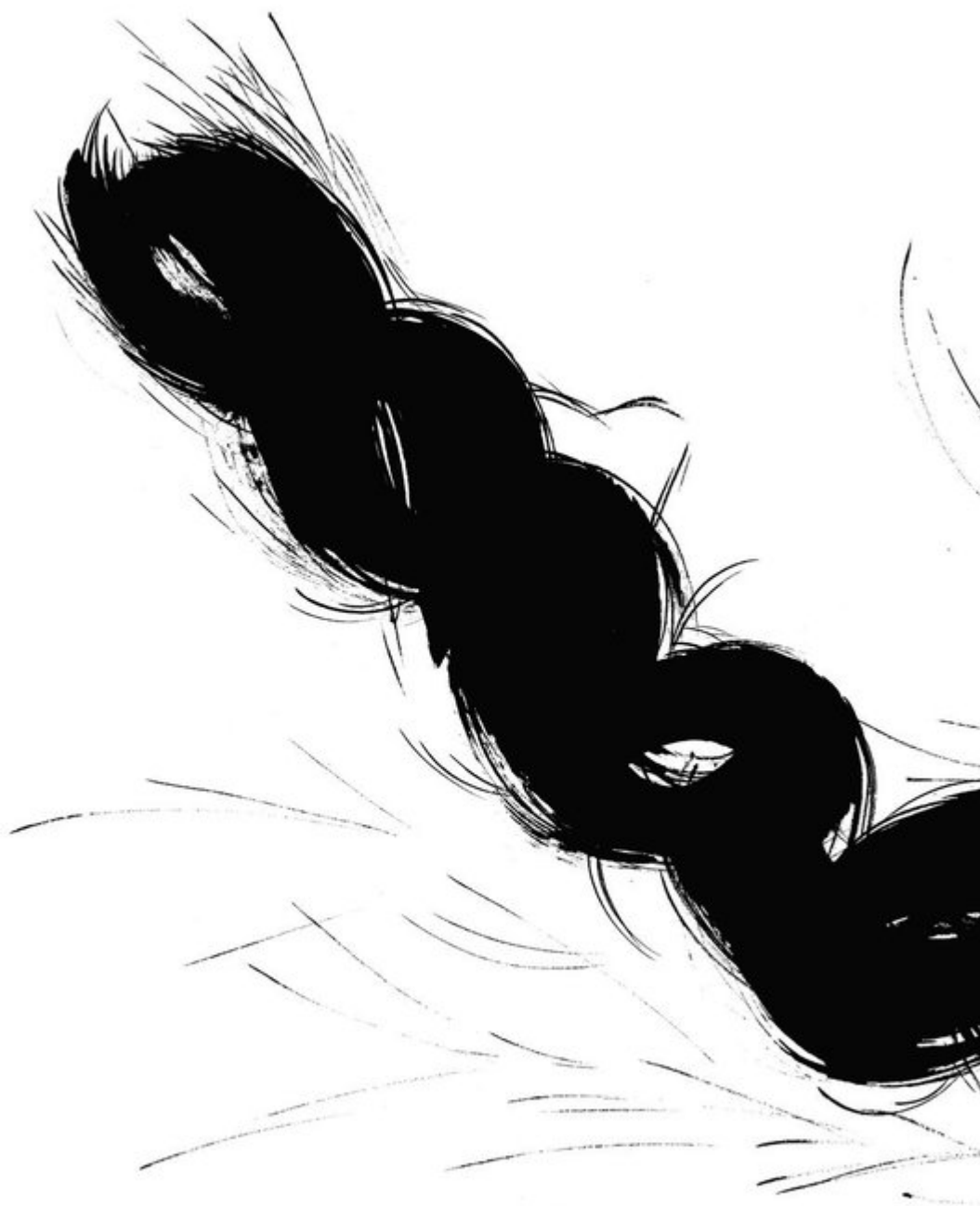




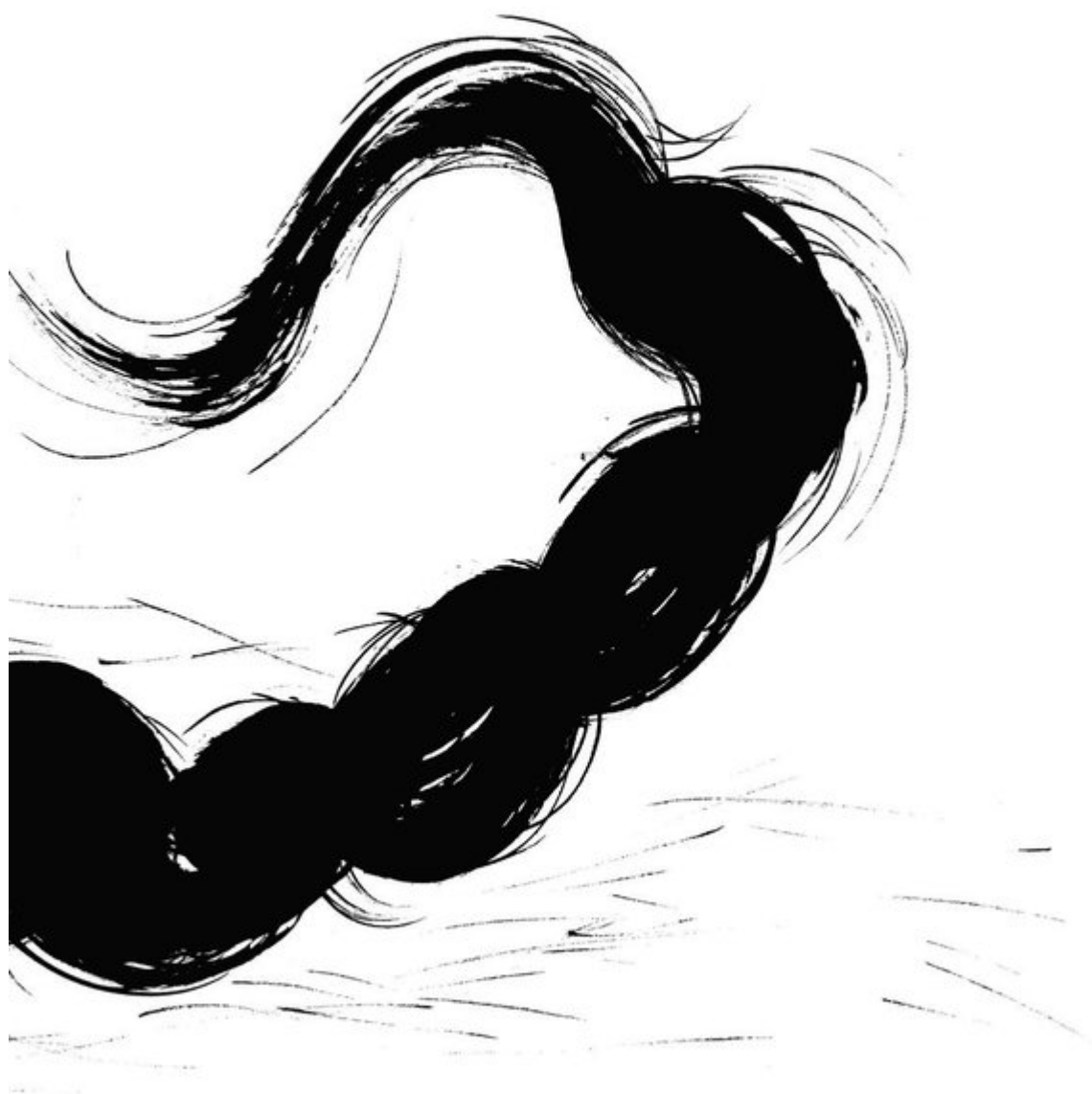














I WANTED TO GO TO SCHOOL  
MORE THAN ANYTHING.





*IT WAS ALL A TRICK. A MONTH PASSED AND NOTHING CHANGED.  
THEY WERE NEVER GOING TO SEND ME TO SCHOOL.*























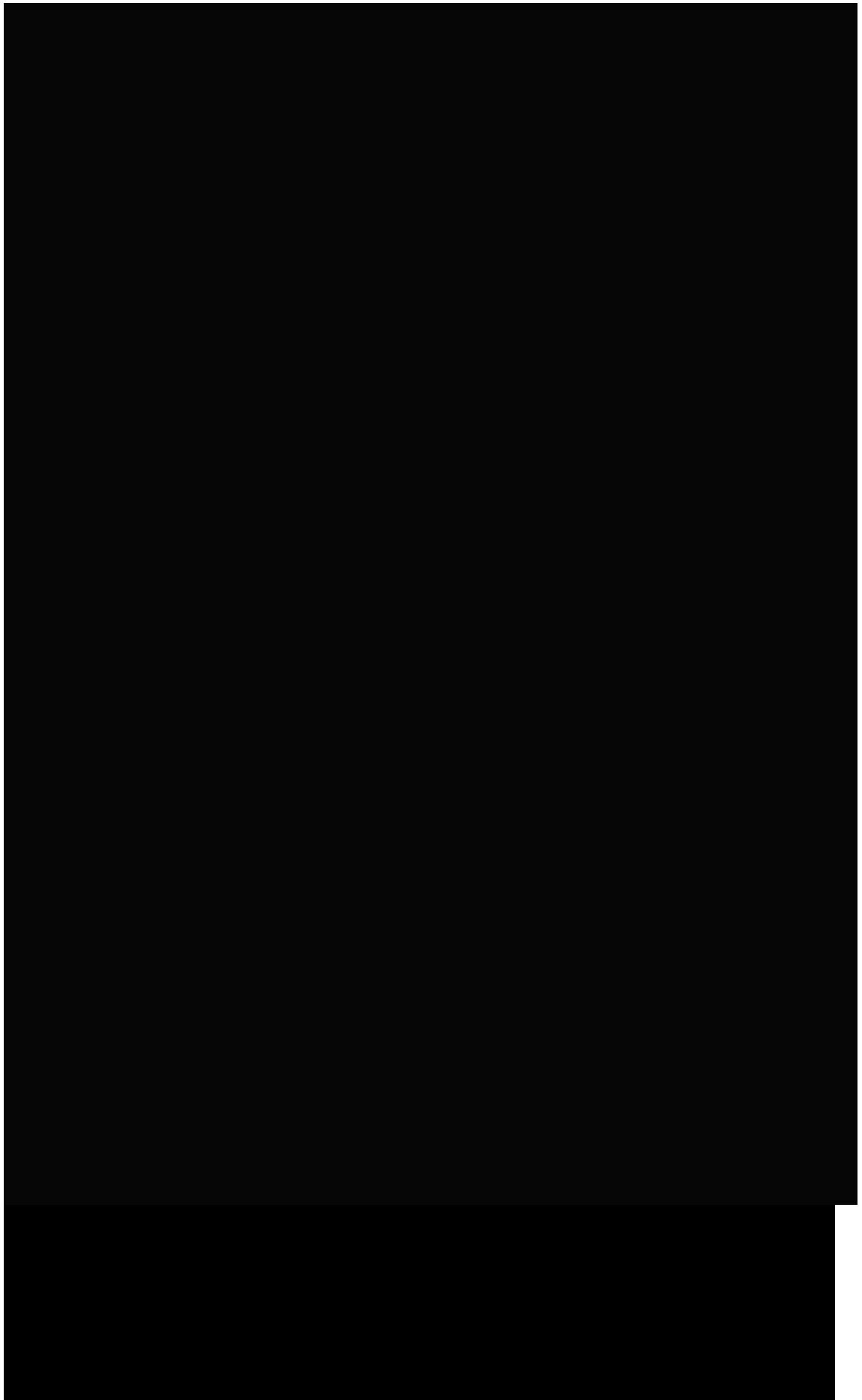


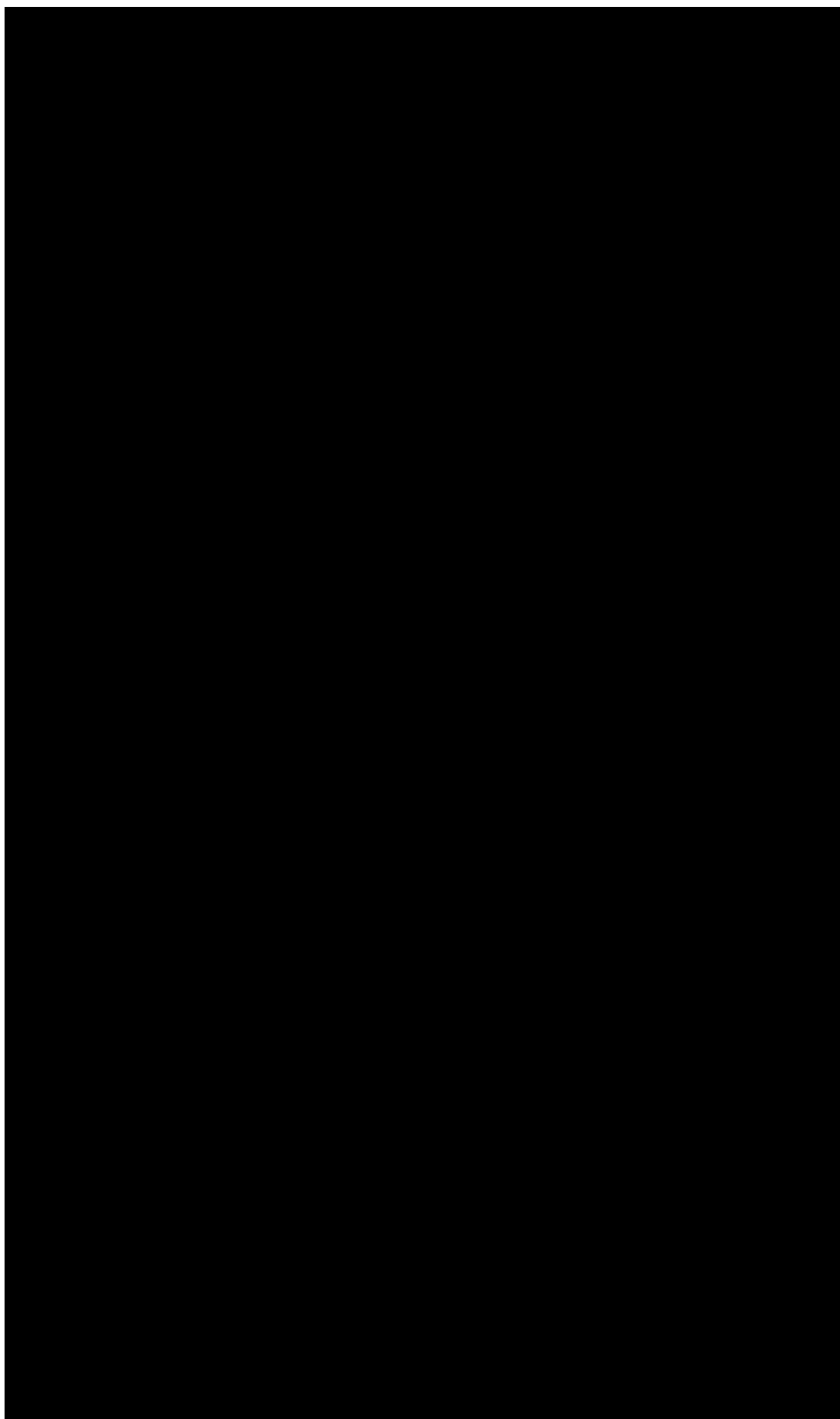










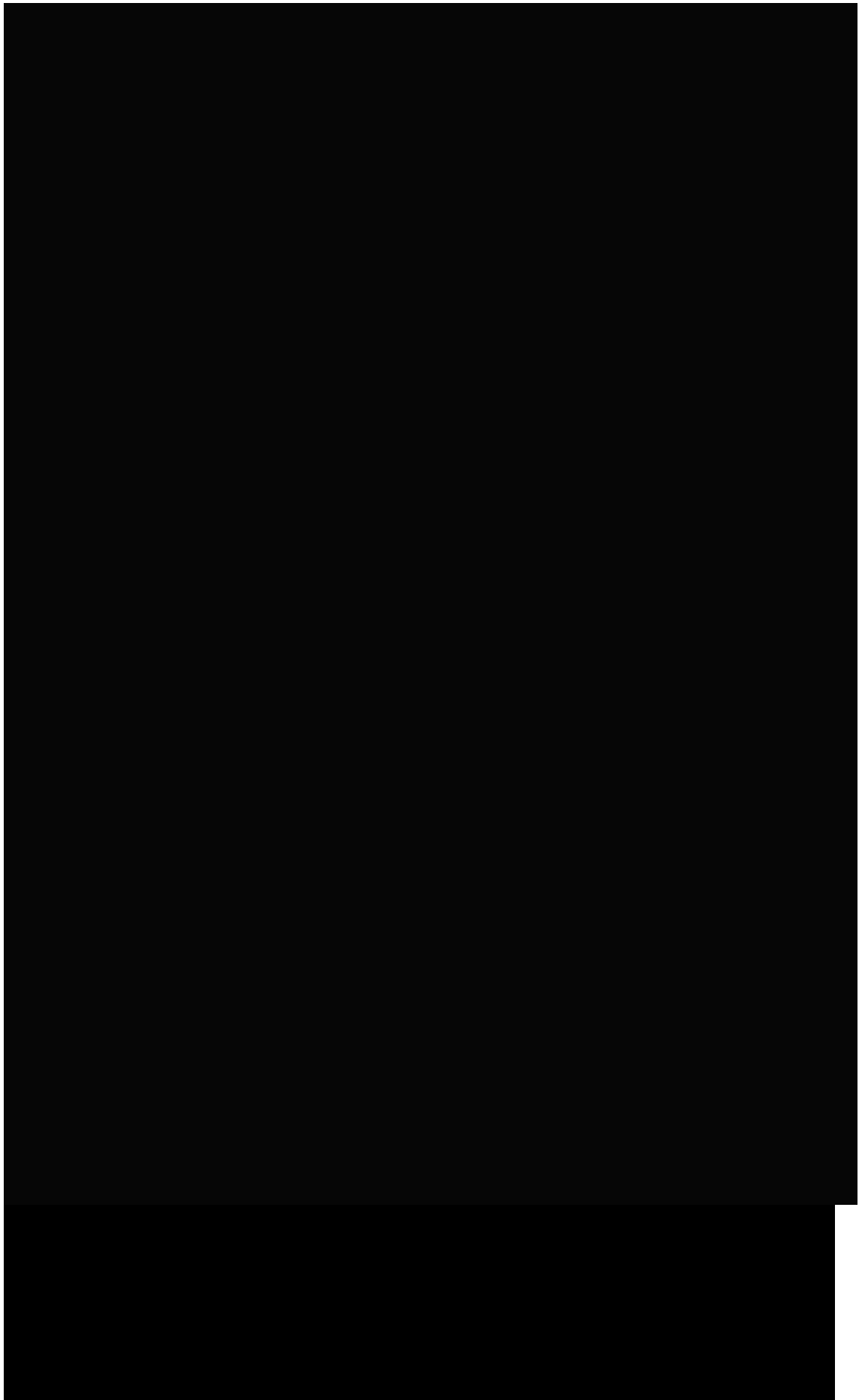


## ULSAN TAVERN















LATE APRIL, 1942



THE OWNER TOLD ME HE'D TAKE ME HOME, SO I FOLLOWED HIM,  
BUT WE ARRIVED AT A HOUSE AS BIG AS THIS NURSING HOME.



IT EVEN HAD A WELL IN THE BACK YARD.



MY NEW HOME WAS A TAVERN.





HERE, WOMEN DANCED,  
SANG, AND PLAYED THE JANGGU  
DRUMS. THEY WERE CALLED  
THE GISAENG.\*



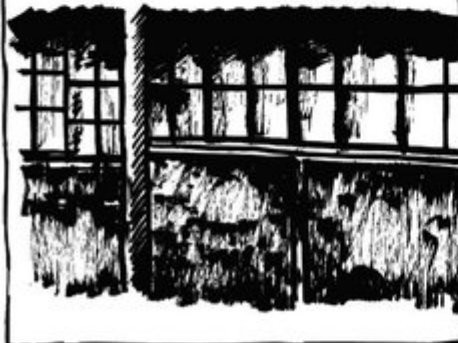
AND I BECAME A MAID ONCE MORE.



THERE WAS A GIRL MY AGE WHO DID ALL THE  
COOKING AND CLEANING. SHE'D ARRIVED THE  
YEAR BEFORE.



BUT THERE WAS TOO MUCH WORK FOR  
JUST ONE PERSON



SO I'D BEEN PURCHASED  
TO HELP HER.



DID THE GISAENG  
LIVE THERE,  
TOO?

\*THE GISAENG WERE HIGHLY SKILLED FEMALE PERFORMERS, WHO  
ENTERTAINED MEN OF WEALTH OR NOBLE BIRTH WITH MUSIC, DANCE,  
AND LITERATURE, OFTEN PROVIDING SEXUAL SERVICES.





THEY HAD THEIR OWN SCHOOL  
WHERE THEY LIVED.



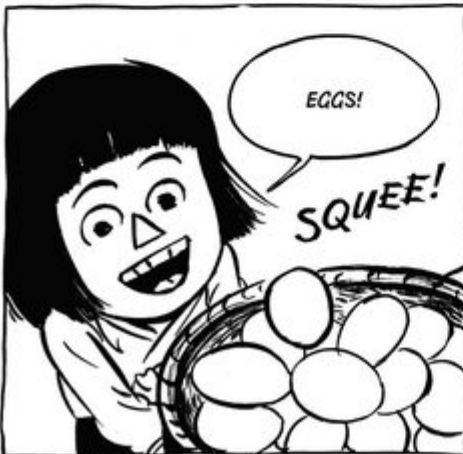
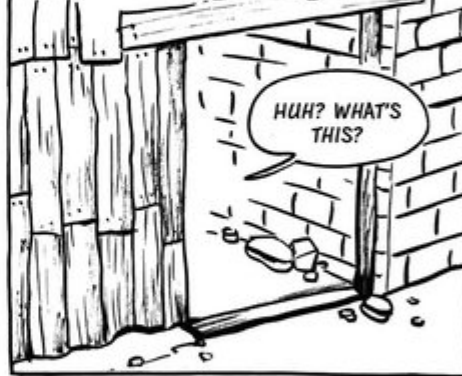
THEY WERE CALLED IN WHEN THE  
MEN WERE DRINKING. THE TAVERN  
WAS A BROTHEL.



ONE DAY, THE OTHER GIRL WASN'T  
ABLE TO WORK.



SO I WENT INTO THE STOREHOUSE  
BY MYSELF TO GET THE RICE.



I WAS SO HUNGRY AND I'D WORKED  
SO HARD. IMAGINE MY  
EXCITEMENT.





OVIOUSLY I COULDN'T EAT THEM RAW.



BUT I HAD A GREAT IDEA.

I'LL JUST  
TAKE ONE.



I BURIED AN EGG  
DEEP IN THE RICE.



I'M GONNA COOK  
THEM TOGETHER!

HE  
HE  
HE



WHY AM I SO DANG  
SMART? HEE HEE.



OK-SUN, GO BRING  
THE RICE IF IT'S  
READY.

OKAY?





BUT INSTEAD OF HIDING THE EGG WHEN  
I WAS SCOOPING THE RICE



I JUST PUSHED IT TO ONE SIDE.



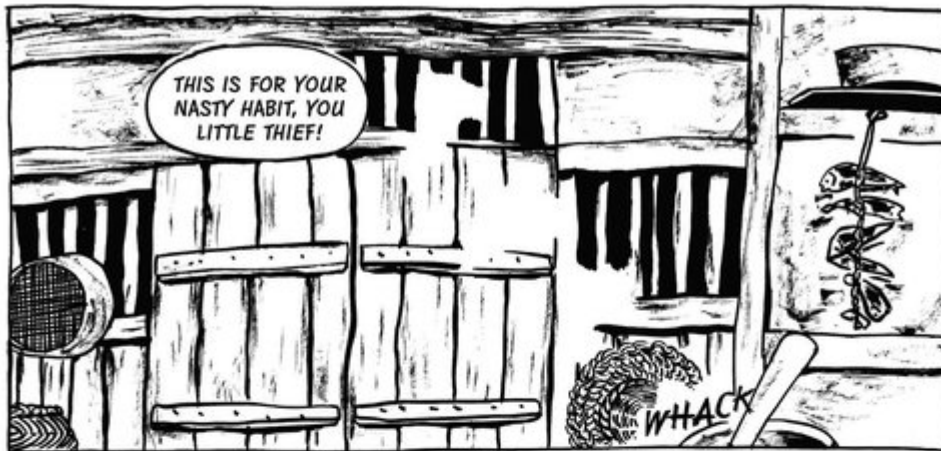
THE MADAM CAUGHT ME RED-HANDED.



I BEGGED HER TO FORGIVE ME, BUT IT WAS NO USE.











IT WAS EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE  
WOULD TRAIN TO BECOME A GISAENG.



THE OTHER GIRL LEARNED, TOO.



BUT I DIDN'T.



THEN ONE DAY THE MADAM CALLED  
ME OVER.





IT WAS JULY.



I'D BEEN AT THE TAVERN FOR  
ABOUT TWENTY DAYS.



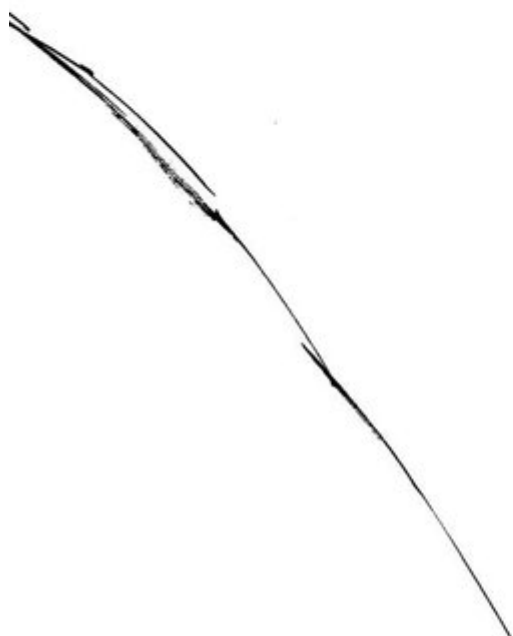
I WAS ON MY WAY BACK WHEN...









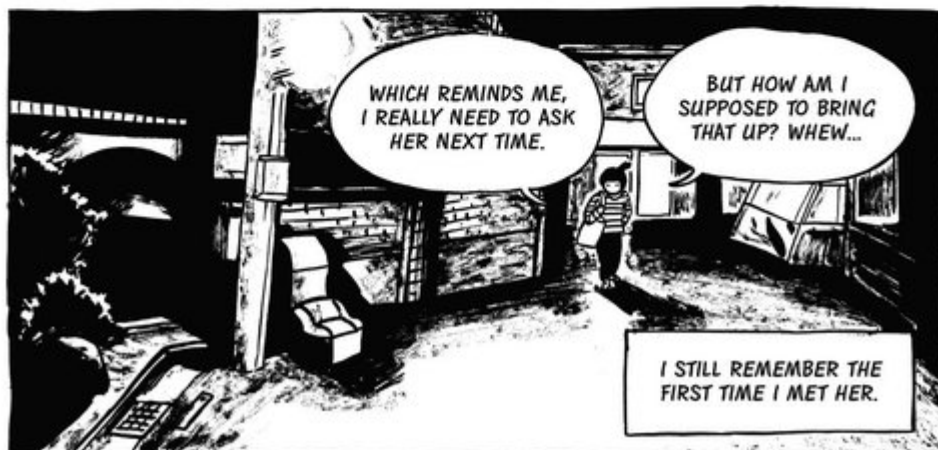
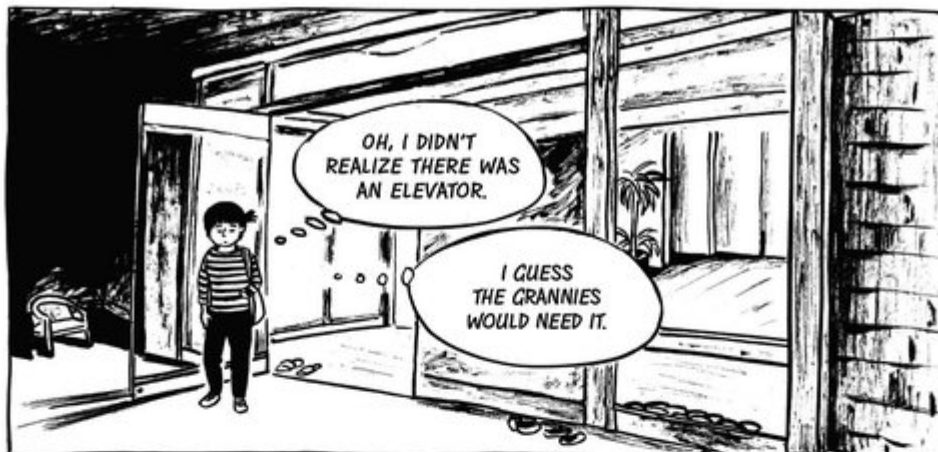


















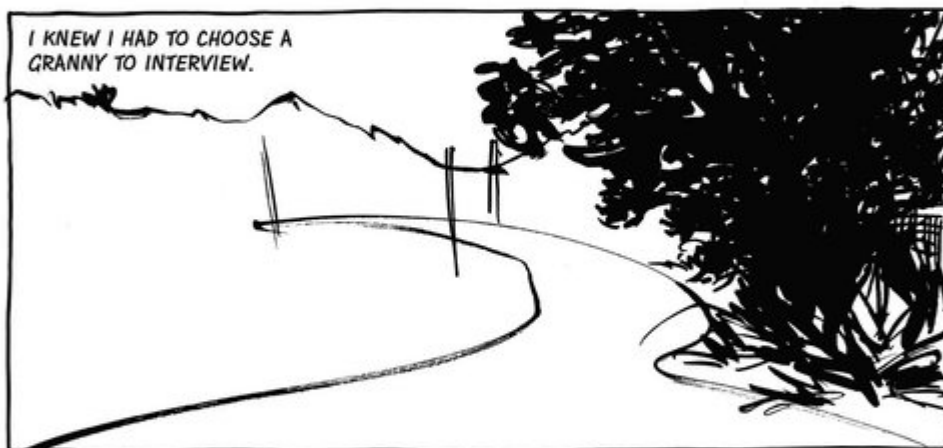
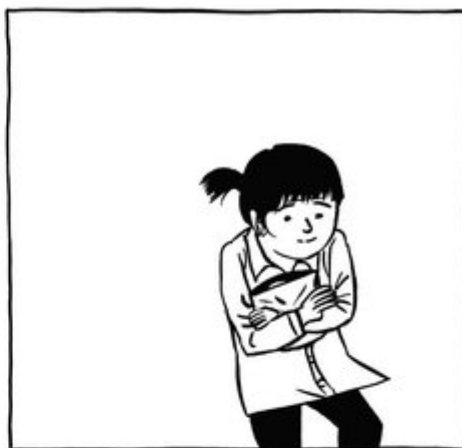
















LUCKILY, I NEEDN'T  
HAVE WORRIED.



HELLO!

MAYBE  
SHE DIDN'T  
HEAR ME?



HELLO THERE!





GRANNY LEE OK-SUN SAT THERE  
ALONE, THE ONLY PERSON IN THE  
LIVING ROOM THAT DAY.



























SO THE WINTER WENT BY.



I'D PROMISED GRANNY I WOULD COME VISIT SOON,  
BUT I COULDN'T, EVEN WHEN SPRING CAME.



I COULDN'T EVEN TAKE A BREAK, BECAUSE  
I NEEDED TO MEET AN IMPORTANT DEADLINE.  
NO MATTER HOW HARD I WORKED, MONEY WAS  
ALWAYS TIGHT. MAYBE THINGS WOULD BE  
DIFFERENT IF I PUMPED OUT A BOOK  
EVERY MONTH...



THE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE  
DONE. I'LL COURIER  
THE MANUSCRIPT  
TO YOU TOMORROW.

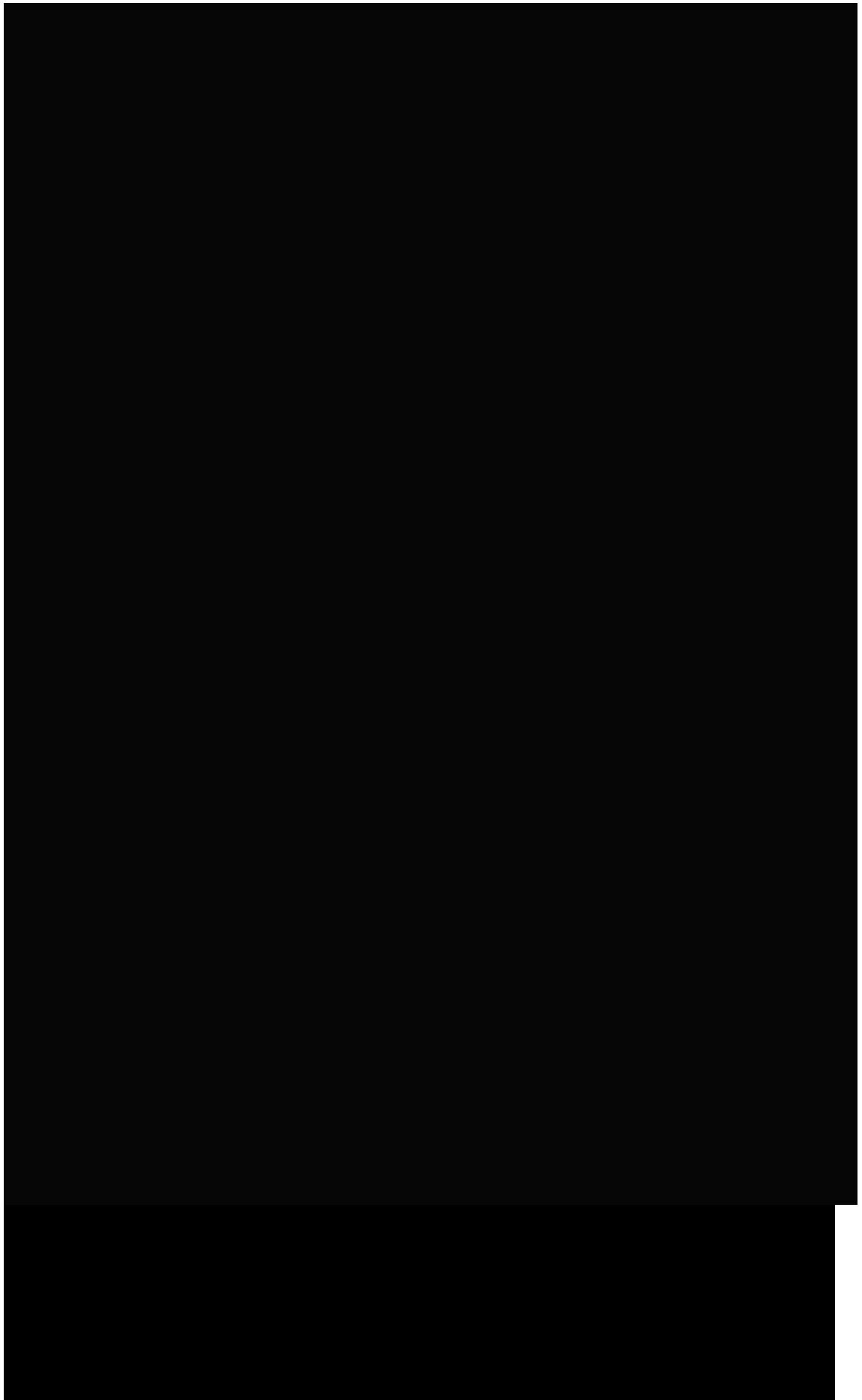
GOOD WORK.

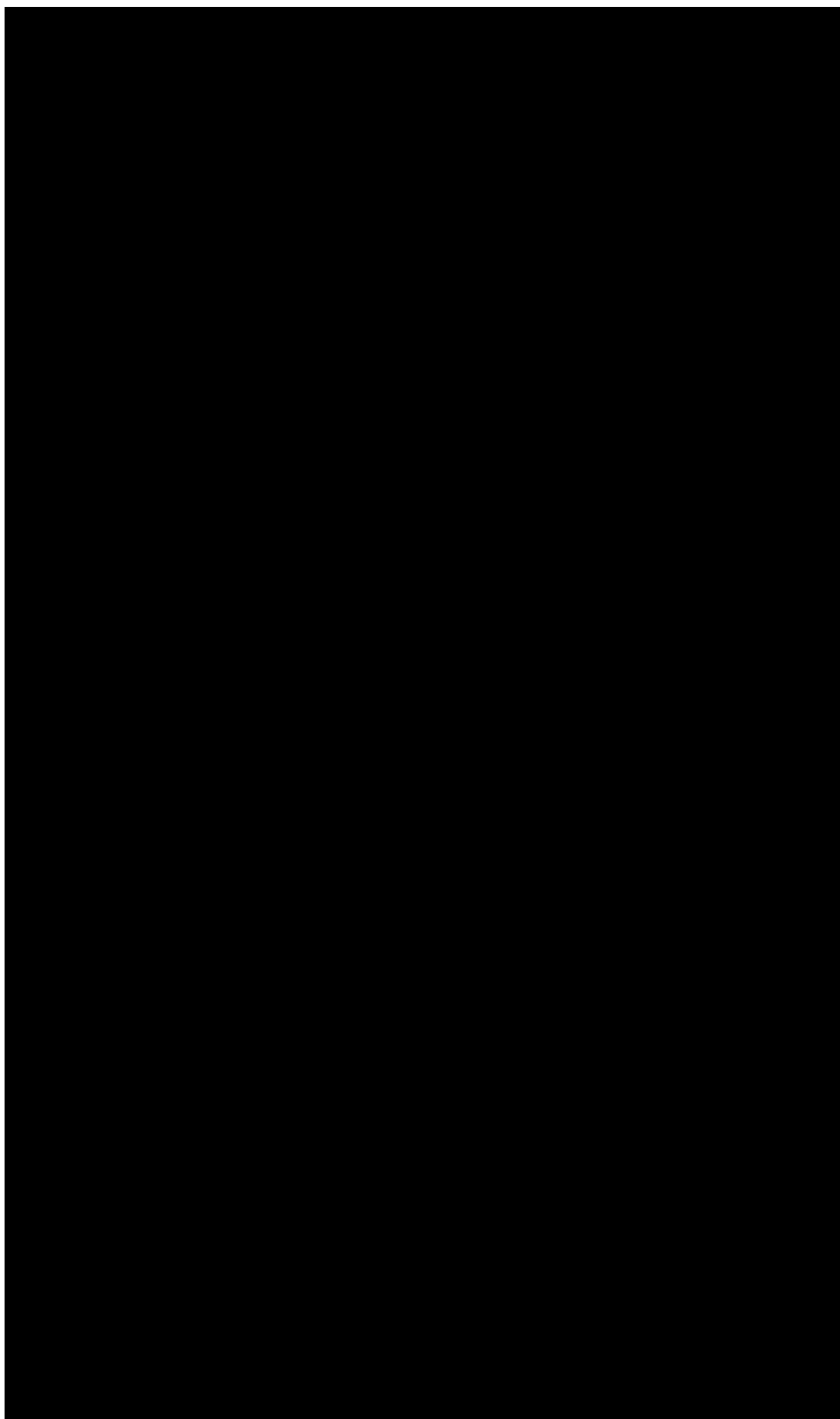
YAWN

FINALLY FINISHED!  
FIRST I'M HITTING  
THE SACK AND THEN  
I'M OFF TO SEE  
GRANNY.







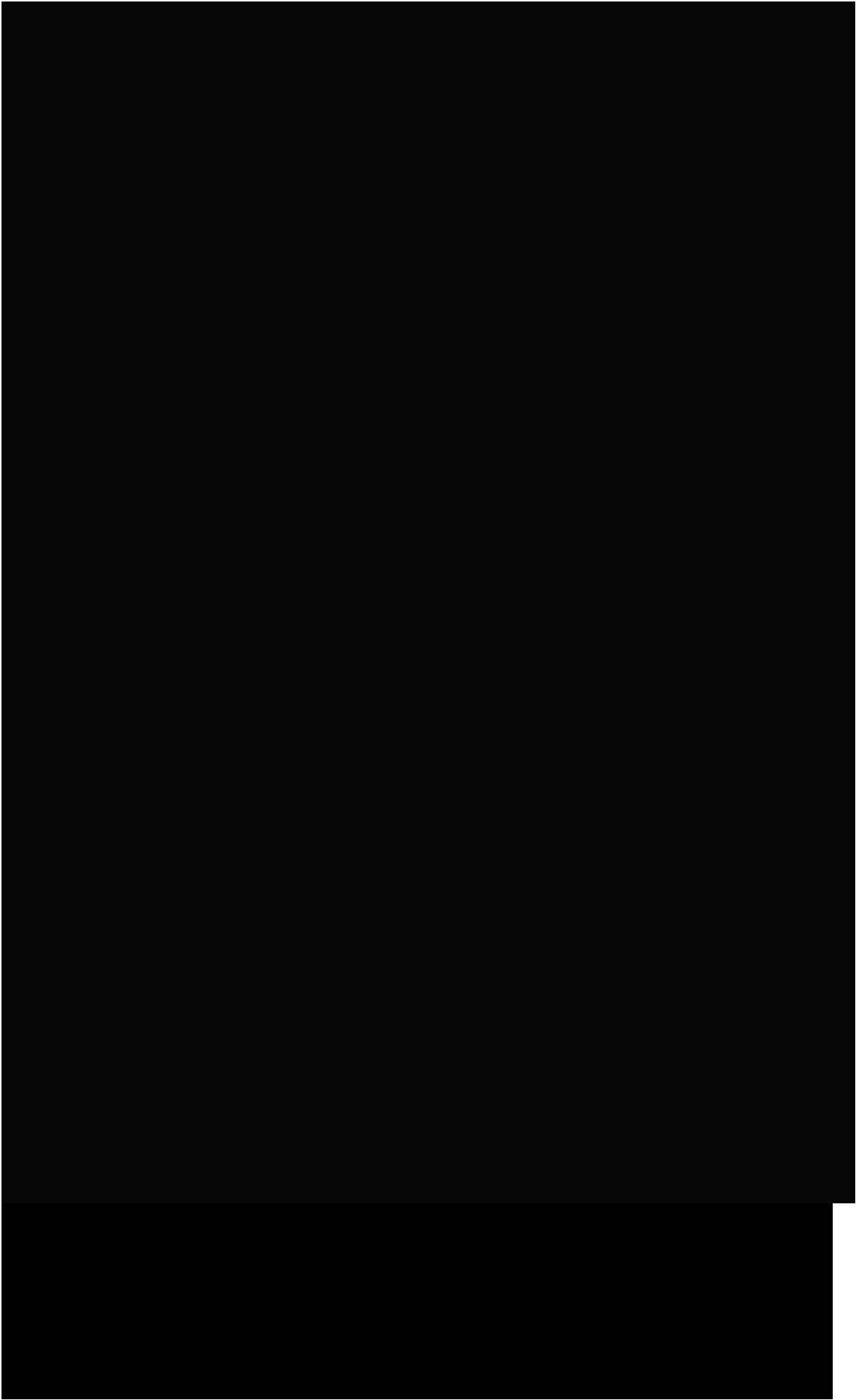


## EAST YANJI AIRPORT















IT WAS A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD COMPACT  
WITH NO AIRBAGS. MY FRIENDS TEASED  
ME ABOUT IT. THEY CALLED IT A WRECK.



BUT A TRIP REQUIRING SUBWAY, BUS,  
AND TAXI



OVER THE COURSE OF  
NEARLY FOUR HOURS



NOW TOOK ONLY TWO.



SIGN: "THE HOUSE OF SHARING"



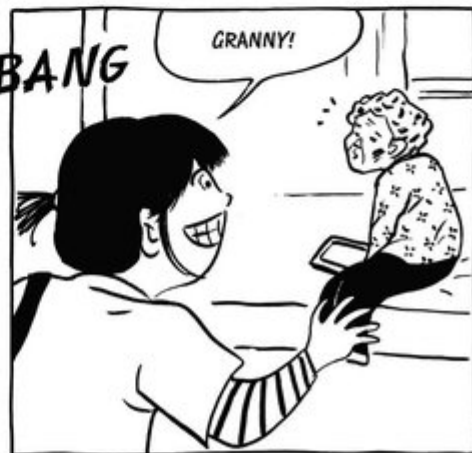
IN NO TIME, I'D ALREADY ARRIVED.  
THE FIRST THING I SEE IS THE NAKED  
BRONZE TORSO OF AN ELDERLY WOMAN.  
IT MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.



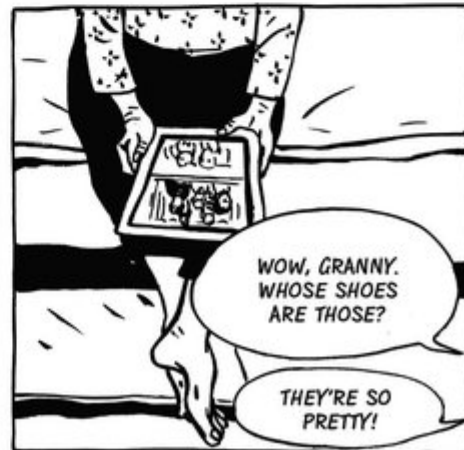
WAS I JUST STIRRING UP PAINFUL MEMORIES FOR GRANNY  
LEE BY TRYING TO TELL HER STORY AS A COMIC WHEN ALL SHE  
WANTED WAS TO PUT THE PAST BEHIND HER? I KNOW MANY  
PEOPLE HAVE COME TO HER WITH SIMILAR AGENDAS...













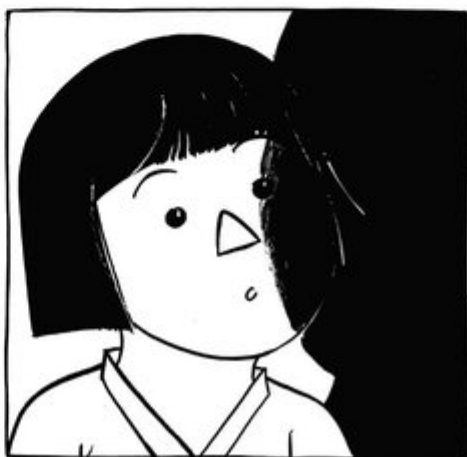




















"WHERE ARE YOU GOING?"  
"WHAT'S YOUR NAME?"  
"WHERE DO YOU LIVE?"





THEY DIDN'T ASK ME ANY OF  
THESE QUESTIONS. THEY JUST  
GRABBED ME AND DRAGGED  
ME AWAY. THAT'S HOW I GOT  
ABDUCTED ON MY WAY BACK  
TO THE TAVERN.

THEY WERE KOREAN  
BUT THEY WEREN'T IN  
UNIFORM, SO I DIDN'T KNOW  
IF THEY WERE SOLDIERS  
OR POLICE OFFICERS.





I KICKED AND SCREAMED.



I ASKED THEM WHY THEY  
WERE TAKING ME.



I SAID MY PARENTS WERE WAITING FOR ME AT HOME.







IT WAS 1942.  
I WAS FIFTEEN YEARS OLD.













EVEN NOW I HAVE A HABIT OF STARING  
AT THE GROUND WHEN I WALK.



SO I NEVER NOTICE IF A PERSON'S  
STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME.



SOMETIMES I GET SO STARTLED.



AIGO, GRANNY.  
YOU SCARED ME!



PEOPLE OFTEN MAKE JOKES ABOUT IT.

DID YOU FIND  
ANY MONEY DOWN  
THERE?



CARE TO SHARE?  
HA HA!

OH, YOU!





THE TWO MEN LOADED ME INTO A TRUCK.  
THERE WERE ALREADY FOUR OTHER  
KIDNAPPED GIRLS IN THERE. THEY  
LOOKED ABOUT MY AGE.



THEN WE WERE TRANSFERRED OVER TO  
OTHER MEN AT ULSAN STATION.



WE WERE PUT ON A TRAIN THAT NIGHT,  
BUT WE HAD NO IDEA IF WE WERE  
HEADED FOR CHINA OR JAPAN.



THERE WERE JAPANESE SOLDIERS  
ON THE TRAIN.



WE WERE LOADED INTO A FREIGHT  
COMPARTMENT WITHOUT ANY WINDOWS.





THERE WERE FIFTEEN GIRLS IN THE FREIGHT COMPARTMENT INCLUDING ME.  
THREE KOREAN MEN GUARDED US TO MAKE SURE  
WE DIDN'T ESCAPE.



I KNEW I HAD TO FIND A WAY OUT.



BUT WE NEVER  
CHANGED TRAINS.









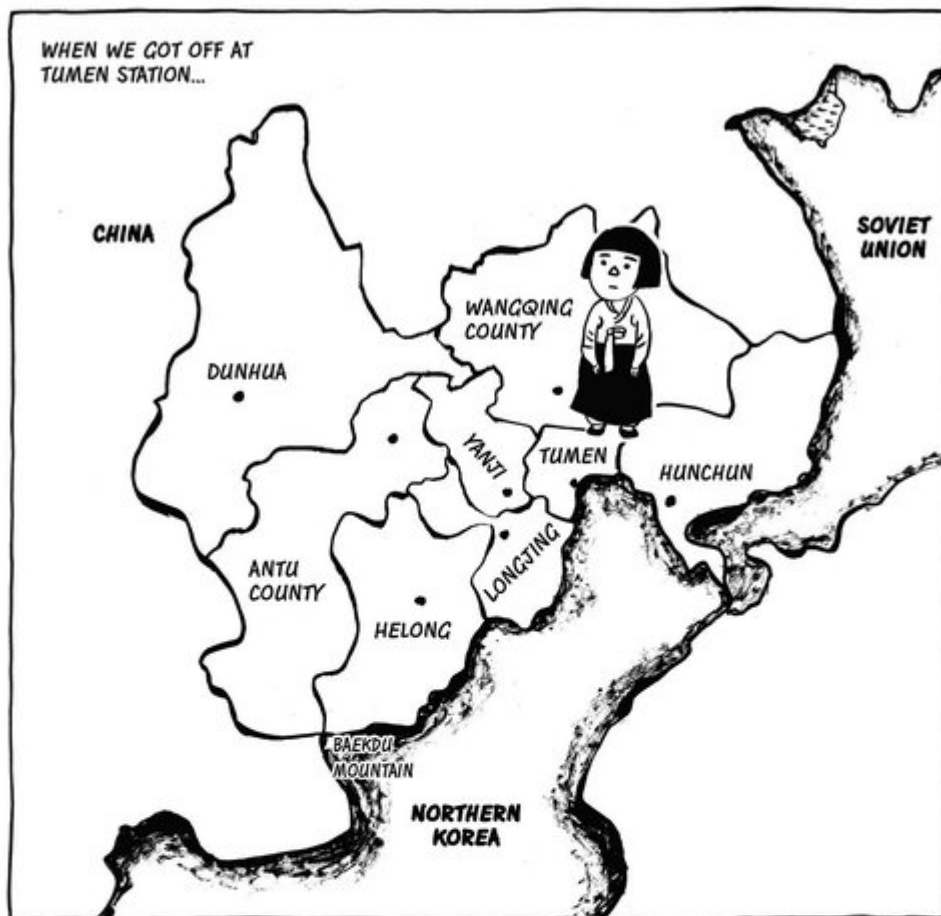


THE TRAIN KEPT GOING AND GOING. WE THOUGHT IT MEANT THAT CHINA WAS FAR AWAY, BUT LATER ON WE FOUND OUT WE'D ENTERED CHINA AS SOON AS WE CROSSED THE TUMEN RIVER.





WHEN WE GOT OFF AT  
TUMEN STATION...



IT WAS ALREADY DARK.





WE WERE TAKEN TO SOME BUILDING  
THAT FELT LIKE A PRISON



AND THEN LED THROUGH A SMALL  
IRON GATE.



THERE WERE NO WINDOWS.



I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THE  
FIVE OTHER GIRLS I'D COME WITH  
WERE PUT IN ONE ROOM



AND I WAS LOCKED UP ALONE IN A  
DIFFERENT ROOM. A ROOM AS BIG AS THE  
LIVING ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF SHARING.



THERE WERE NO ELECTRICITY  
OR CANDLES.





THE NEXT MORNING, FOUR OF THE  
GIRLS WERE SENT SOMEWHERE ELSE



AND THE REMAINING GIRL AND I WERE  
PUT ON A TRAIN AGAIN.



THIS TRIP WAS MUCH SHORTER.



WHEN WE GOT OFF, WE WERE IN  
THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.





WE HAD ARRIVED AT THE EAST YANJI AIRPORT.



THE AIRPORT WAS UNDER  
CONSTRUCTION, BECAUSE  
IT WAS TOO SMALL TO  
SUPPORT JAPAN'S  
EXPANSION INTO  
CHINA.



IT ISN'T USED ANYMORE, BUT THE SITE'S  
STILL THERE. A JAPANESE AIR SQUADRON  
WAS STATIONED THERE, BUT I CAN'T  
REMEMBER THE NAME NOW.

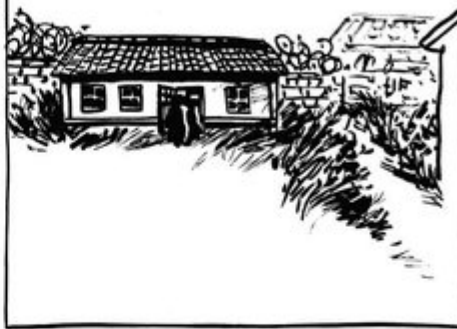




THEY TOOK US TO A HOUSE WITH  
MUD WALLS AND A TILE ROOF.



IT USED TO BE THE MILITARY  
QUARTERS BUT THE SOLDIERS  
HAD BEEN MOVED SOMEWHERE ELSE



SO THAT WE COULD MOVE IN.



THERE WERE TEN OF US.



THAT HOUSE WAS A COMFORT  
STATION. TWO OR THREE GIRLS  
SHARED A ROOM.





A JAPANESE COUPLE MANAGED THE COMFORT STATION. THE MAN WAS IN HIS FORTIES, BUT HIS WIFE WAS YOUNGER.



YOU CAN CALL ME OBASAN OR OKASAN.\*



THERE WAS A JAPANESE GIRL AT THE STATION. THEY SAID SHE HAD COME VOLUNTARILY TO EARN MONEY.

I'M DIFFERENT FROM YOU GIRLS.

CALL ME NESAN.\*\*

WHY DOES SHE THINK SHE'S DIFFERENT?

DOES SHE HAVE AN EXTRA FINGER OR SOMETHING?

HA!



SHE HAD A LOT MORE FREEDOM THAN US. THE MANAGERS DIDN'T FORCE HER TO DO ANYTHING.

YOU GIRLS ARE UGLY DUCKLINGS.



BUT I'M A WHITE SWAN. HEE HEE HEE.

WHAT THE HECK?



\*OBASAN IS THE JAPANESE WORD FOR AUNT AND OKASAN IS THE JAPANESE WORD FOR MOM.  
\*\*NESAN IS THE JAPANESE WORD FOR OLDER SISTER.













IN KOREA IT GETS SO HOT IN JULY. BUT YANJI'S DIFFERENT.  
YOU EVEN START MAKING KIMCHI EARLIER OVER THERE.

IT'S COLD  
IN JULY?

PRETTY  
COOL.

WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED AT THE AIRPORT, I SAW SO MANY  
PEOPLE WHO'D BEEN BROUGHT AGAINST THEIR WILL.



THERE WERE THE CHINESE AND THOSE JAPANESE PIGS. BUT MOST WERE KOREANS.



THE KOREANS AND CHINESE GOT THE TOUGHEST, DIRTIEST JOBS. THE JAPANESE HAD IT BETTER.



MOST WERE STILL KIDS, BARELY NINETEEN.



YOU THINK GIRLS GOT OFF EASY? WE DID EVERYTHING THE MEN DID.





SINCE WE WORKED, THEY HAD TO FEED US.



YOU KNOW THOSE STEAMED BUNS  
THEY SELL AT THE MARKET?



EVERY MORNING, WE EACH  
GOT A SMALL ONE.



HOW WERE WE SUPPOSED  
TO LAST THE WHOLE DAY



AFTER EATING ONE  
TINY BUN?

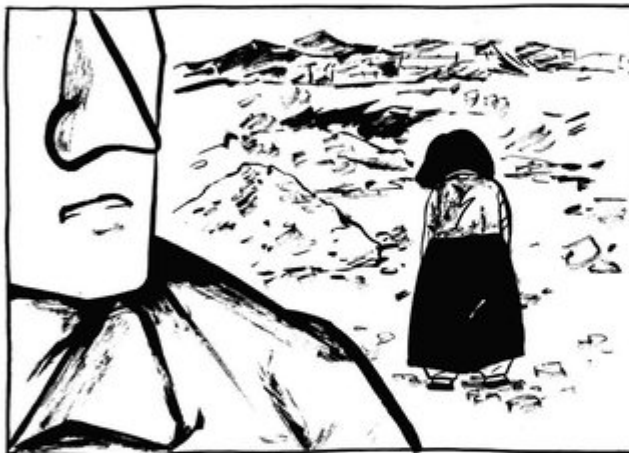


WE DIDN'T EVEN  
GET WATER.













HE LEFT BEFORE I COULD ASK FOR HIS NAME.  
I ASSUMED HE WAS ONE OF THE FORCED LABORERS  
FROM KOREA.





SINCE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE COULDN'T WORK IN THE SAME SPOT, THEY SPLIT US UP.



WE WERE COLD AND HUNGRY.



WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE BLANKETS.



THOSE WHO WERE ALREADY THERE  
HAD SOME, BUT AS NEW ARRIVALS,  
WE HAD NOTHING.



WE GOT THEIR BLANKETS ONLY IF THEY  
LEFT THE CAMP, SO OF COURSE THERE  
WEREN'T ANY FOR US.















THEY HAD PUT UP AN ELECTRIC FENCE ALL AROUND THE AIRPORT  
TO STOP PEOPLE FROM ESCAPING.





WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO WORK TILL WE DROPPED DEAD.  
THERE WAS NO WAY OUT.

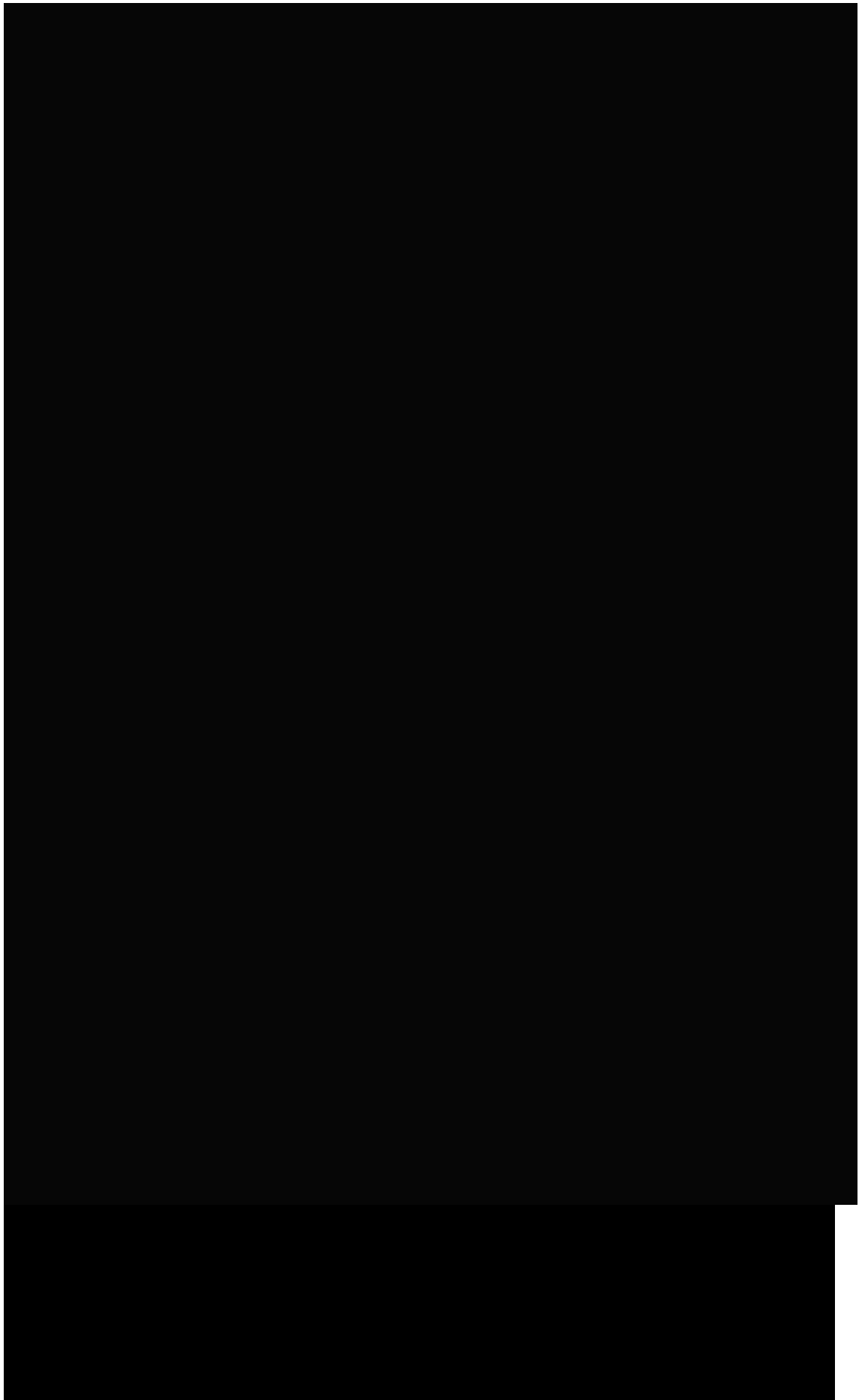


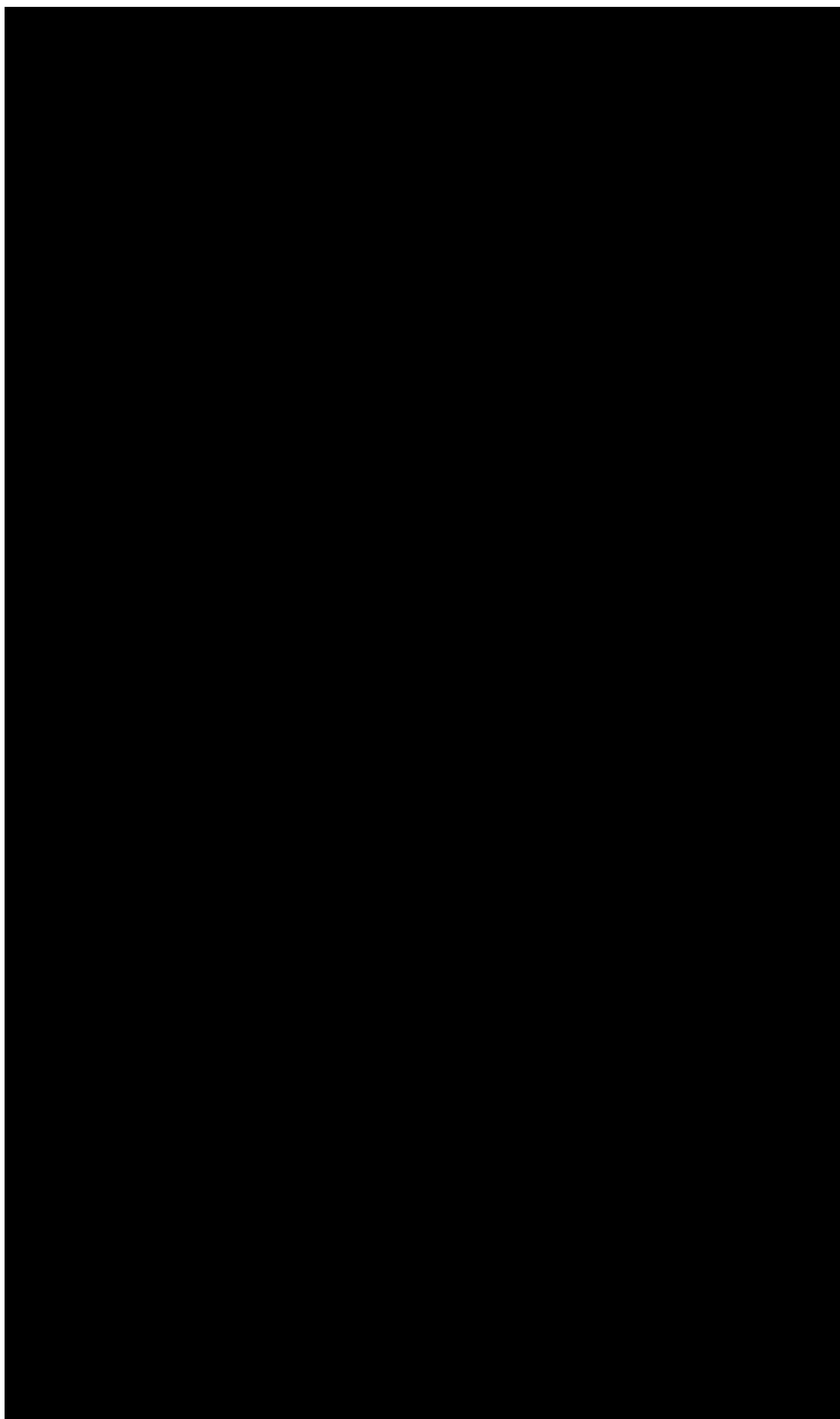








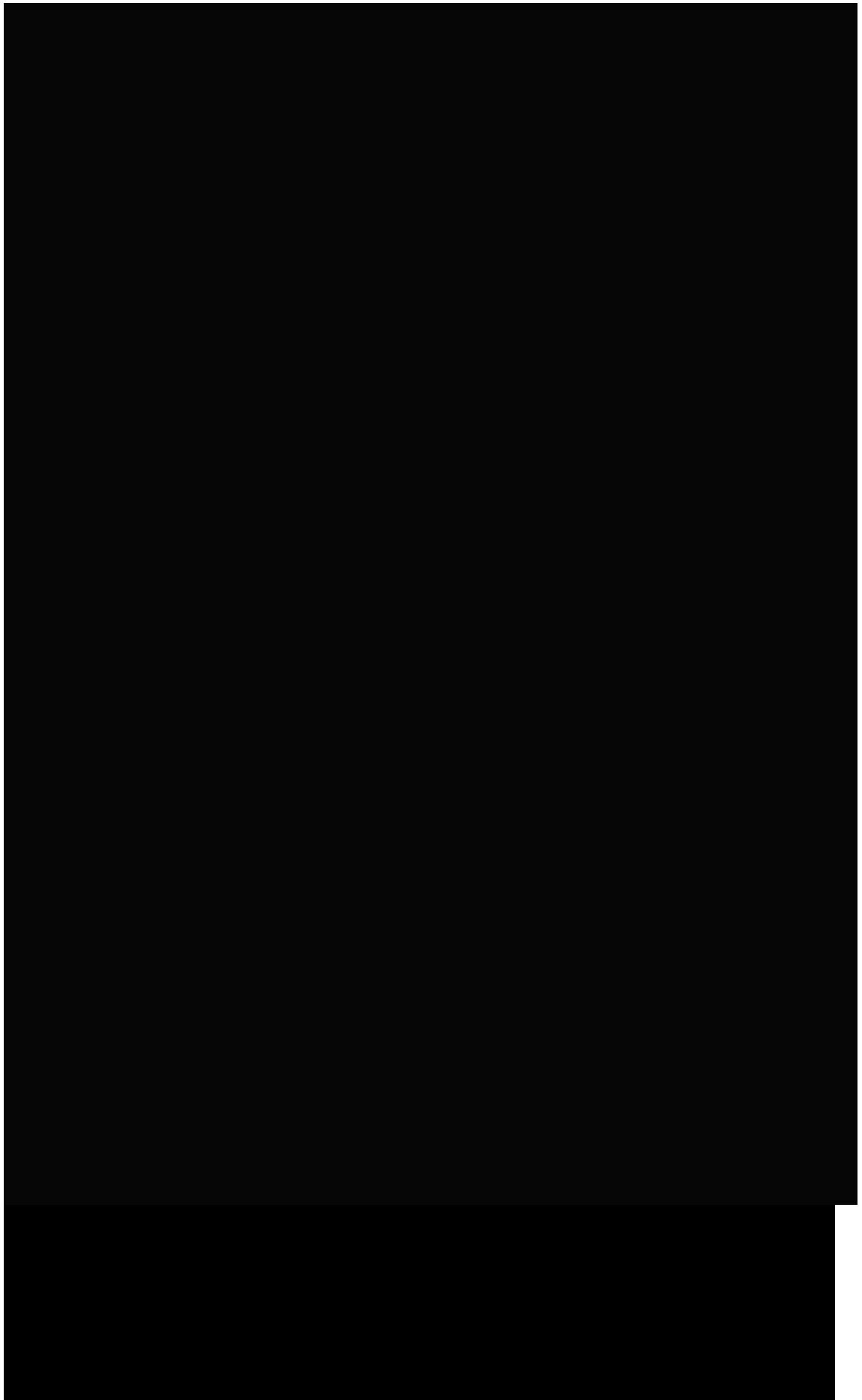


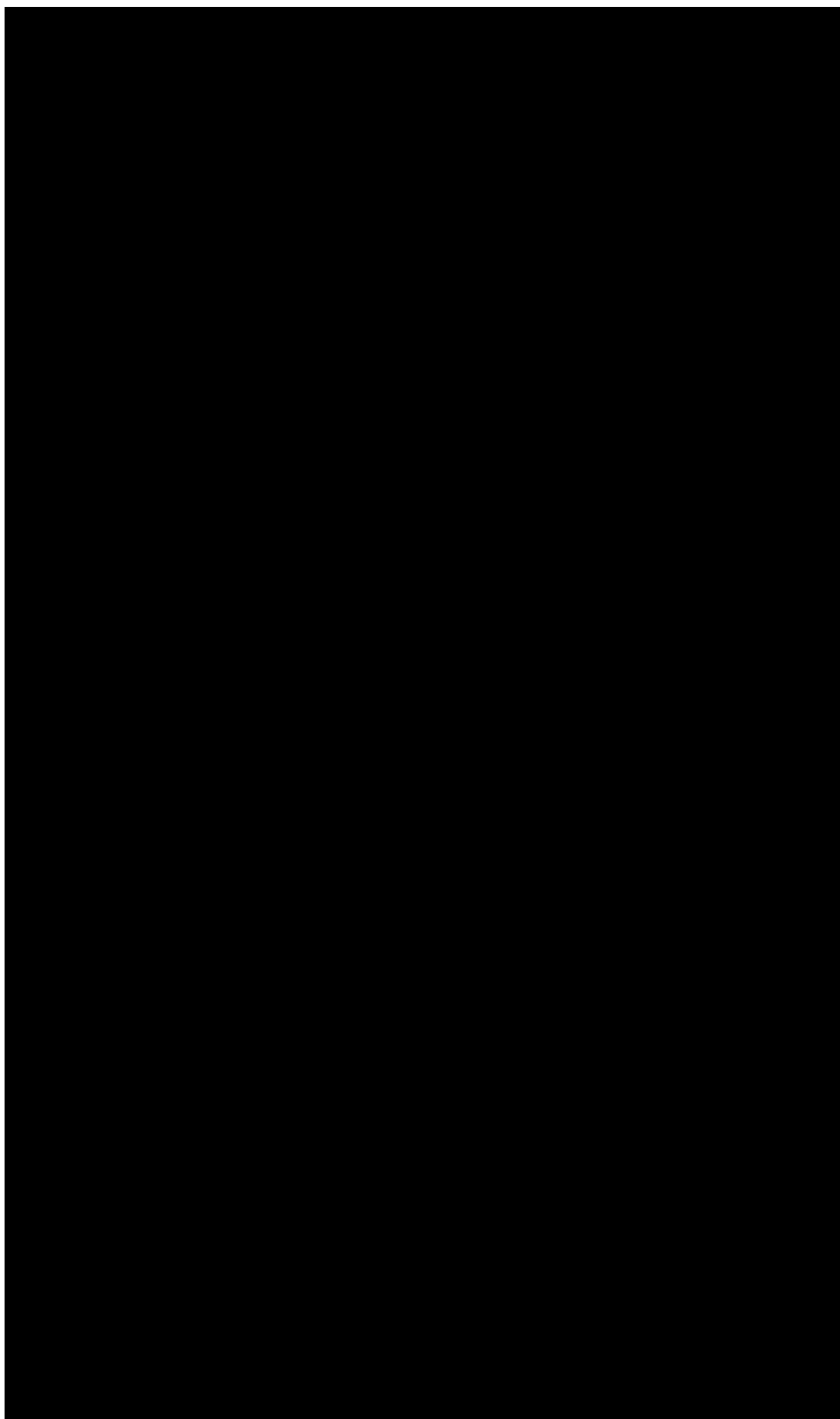


## CHASTITY





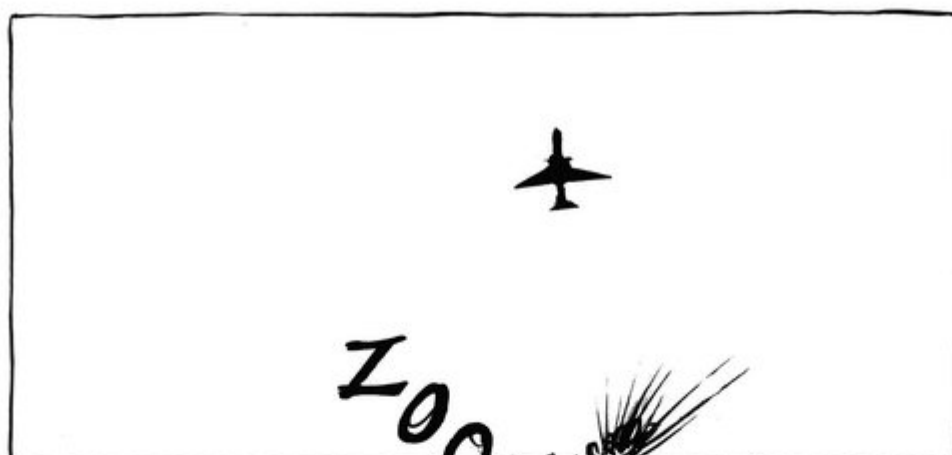


















WE HAD FINISHED OUR WORK FOR  
THE DAY AND WERE IN OUR ROOM,  
COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED





WHEN A GROUP OF SOLDIERS  
BARGED IN.





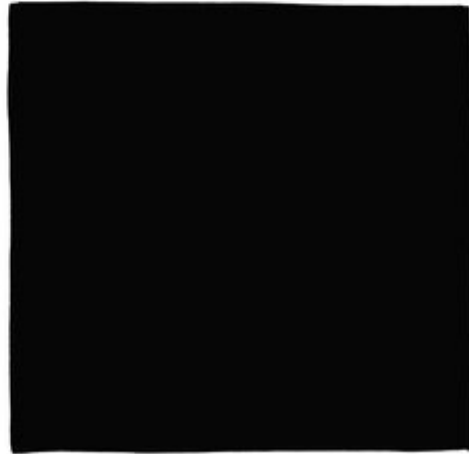
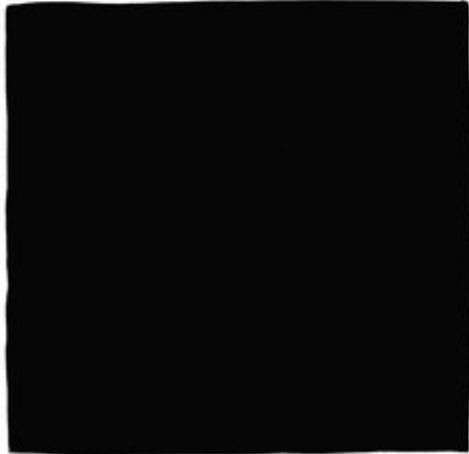
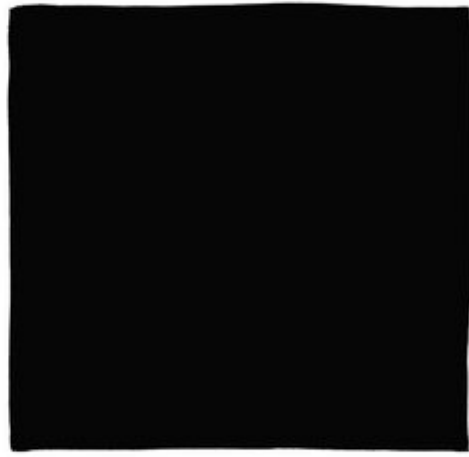
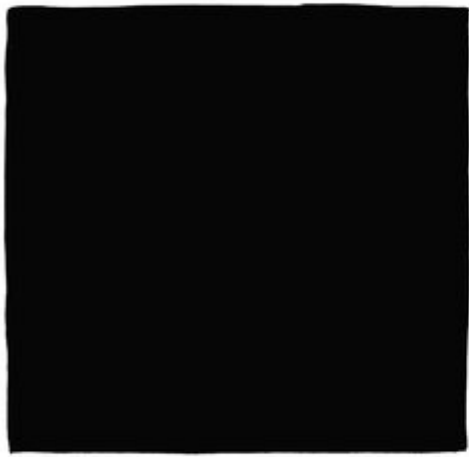
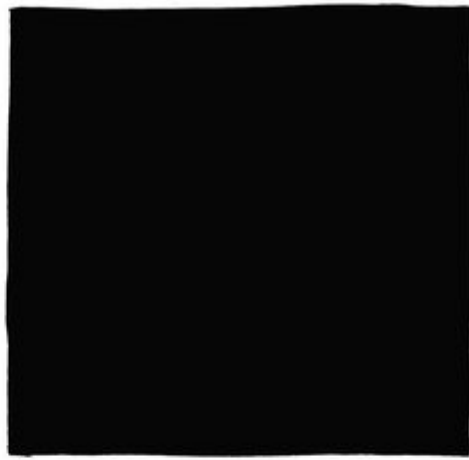
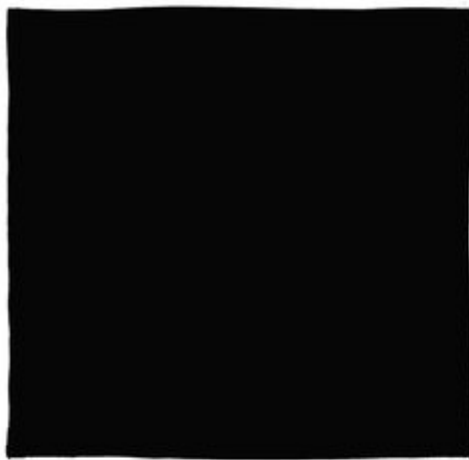




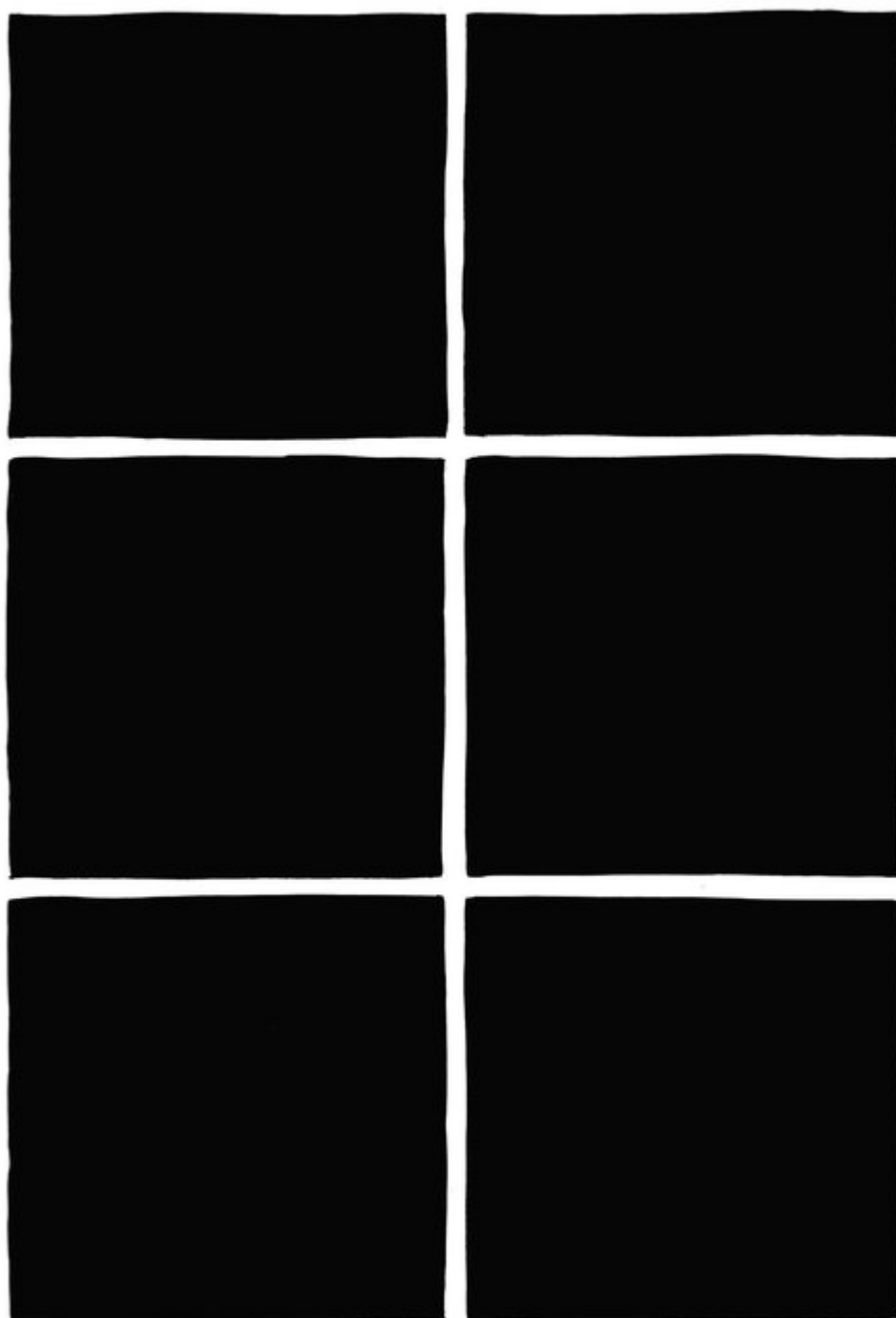






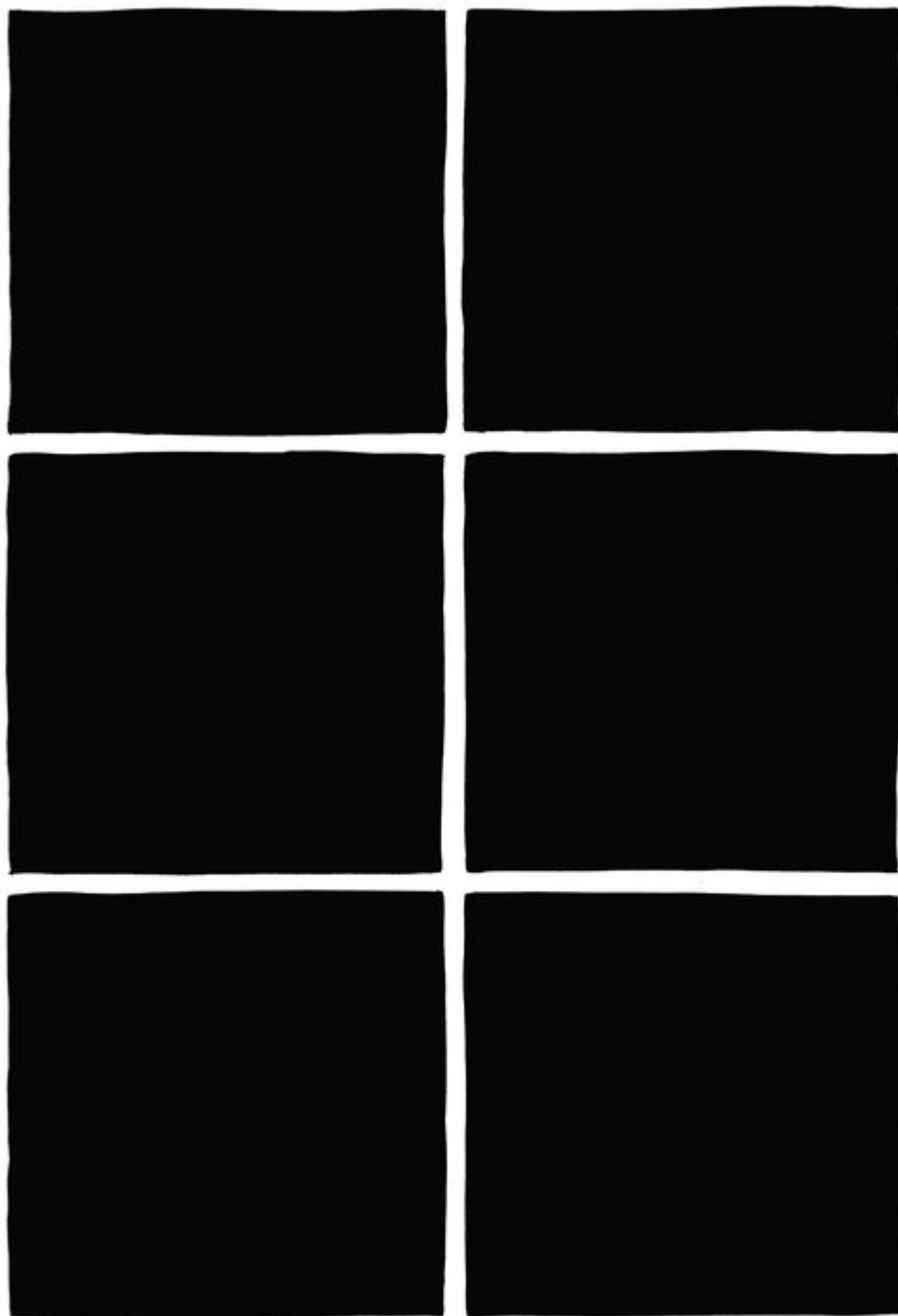














GIRLS HAVE A THING  
CALLED A HYMEN.

IMAGINE HOW I FELT

WHEN MINE RIPPED

BEFORE I COULD GET  
MARRIED OR SEE THE FACE  
OF MY HUSBAND.

IT WAS AWFUL.



I BLED SO MUCH.



I FELT SO DIRTY.



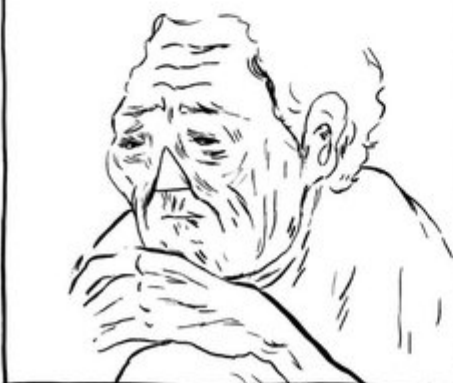
THAT'S WHY SO MANY GIRLS TRY TO KILL  
THEMSELVES AFTER RAPE.



I WANTED TO DIE.



BUT I COULDN'T KILL MYSELF.



NO MATTER HOW MUCH I WANTED TO,  
THERE WAS NO WAY TO DO IT.











MORE SOLDIERS CAME. THEY NEVER WORE CONDOMS.



SOON MEDICS CAME FROM THE MILITARY HOSPITAL TO CHECK US FOR VENEREAL DISEASES.



CONDUCT THOROUGH EXAMS SO THAT OUR IMPERIAL FORCES DON'T CONTRACT VENEREAL DISEASES.

THESE ARE THE ORDERS.

HAI.



EVERY WEEK AT THE COMFORT STATION



WE HAD TO UNDERGO MEDICAL EXAMS.





CONDOMS WERE REQUIRED

PLEASE PUT  
ON A CONDOM.

WHORE!

WHO THE HELL  
DO YOU THINK  
YOU ARE?



BUT DID THEY LISTEN?



WHEN THEY CAME  
IN, THEY NEVER  
TALKED ABOUT  
THEIR UNIT



SO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO LEAK  
OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION.



IT WAS UP TO THE SOLDIERS HOW  
LONG THEY STAYED.



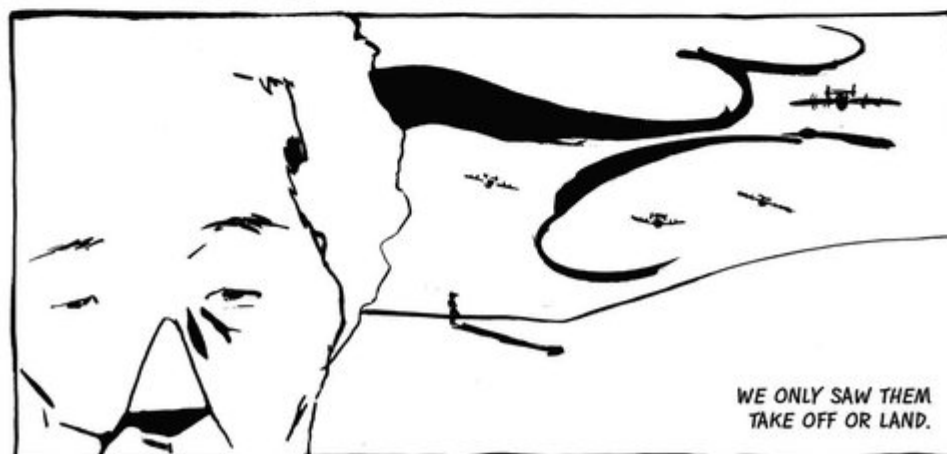




THEY CLIMBED ABOARD PLANES TO  
CARRY OUT SORTIES.



SINCE WE WEREN'T ALLWED NEAR THE PLANES,  
WE DIDN'T KNOW HOW MANY THERE WERE  
OR WHERE THEY WERE HEADED.



WE ONLY SAW THEM  
TAKE OFF OR LAND.



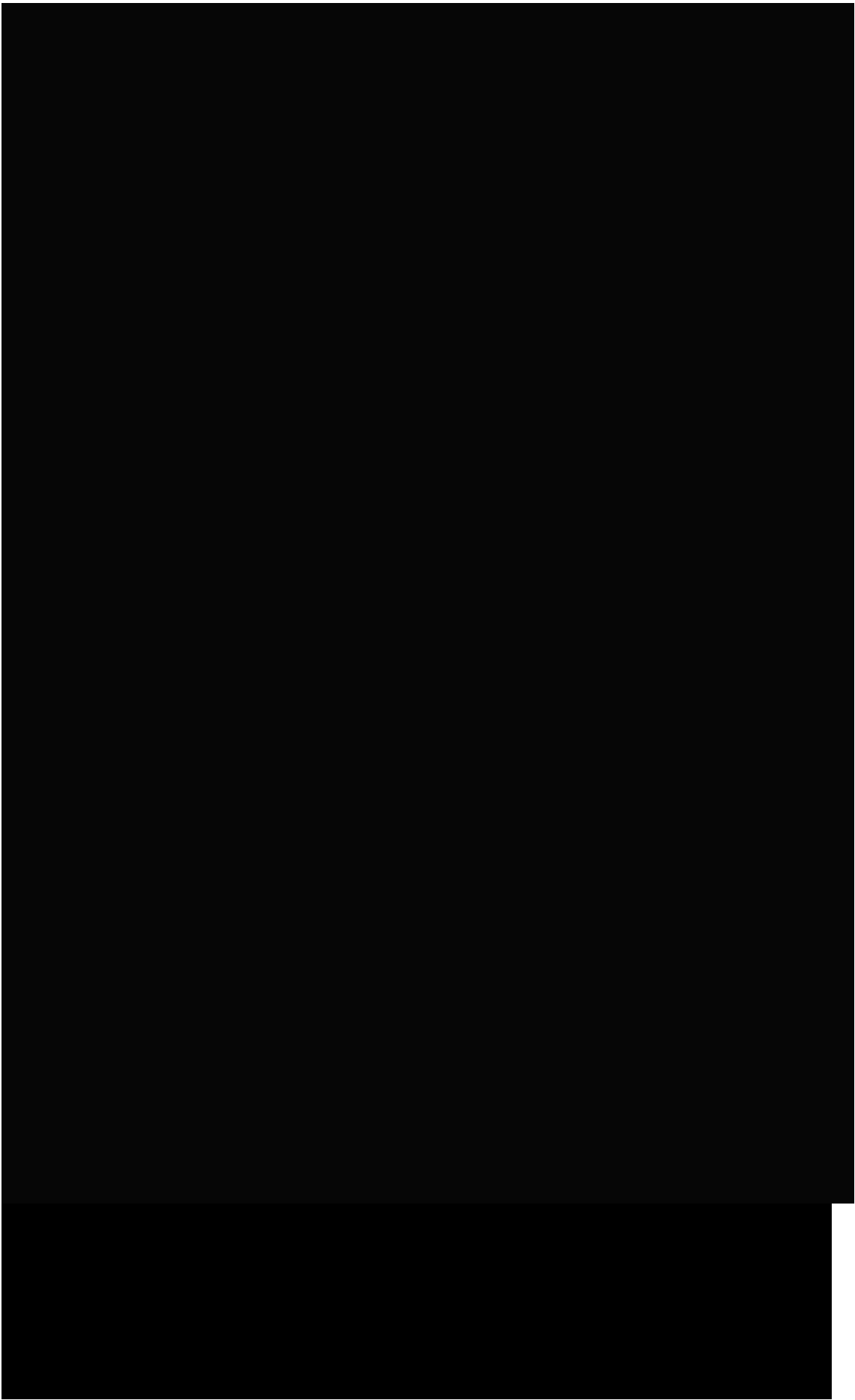


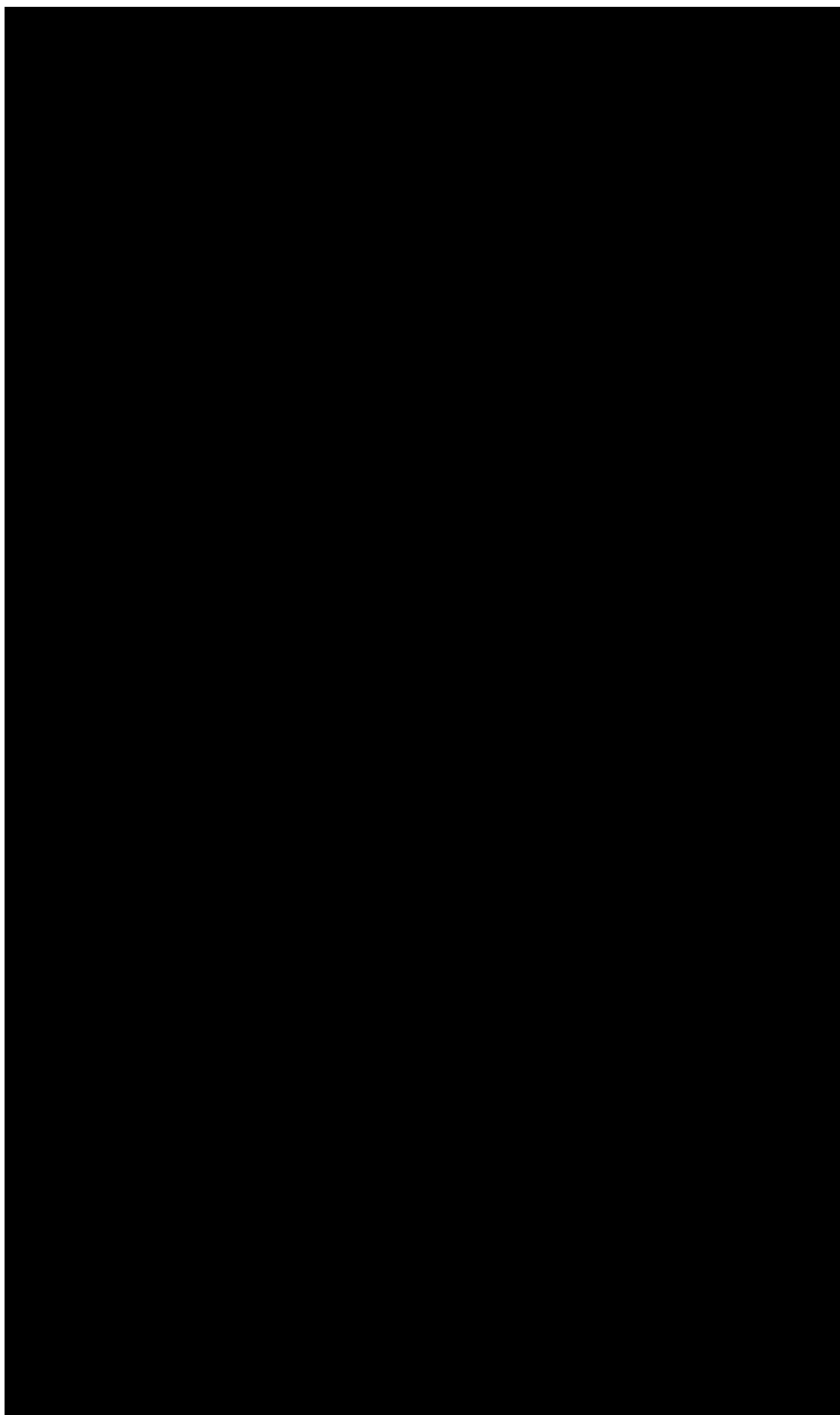
SOMETIMES I WONDERED:  
WOULD THAT PLANE FLY  
OVER MY HOME?







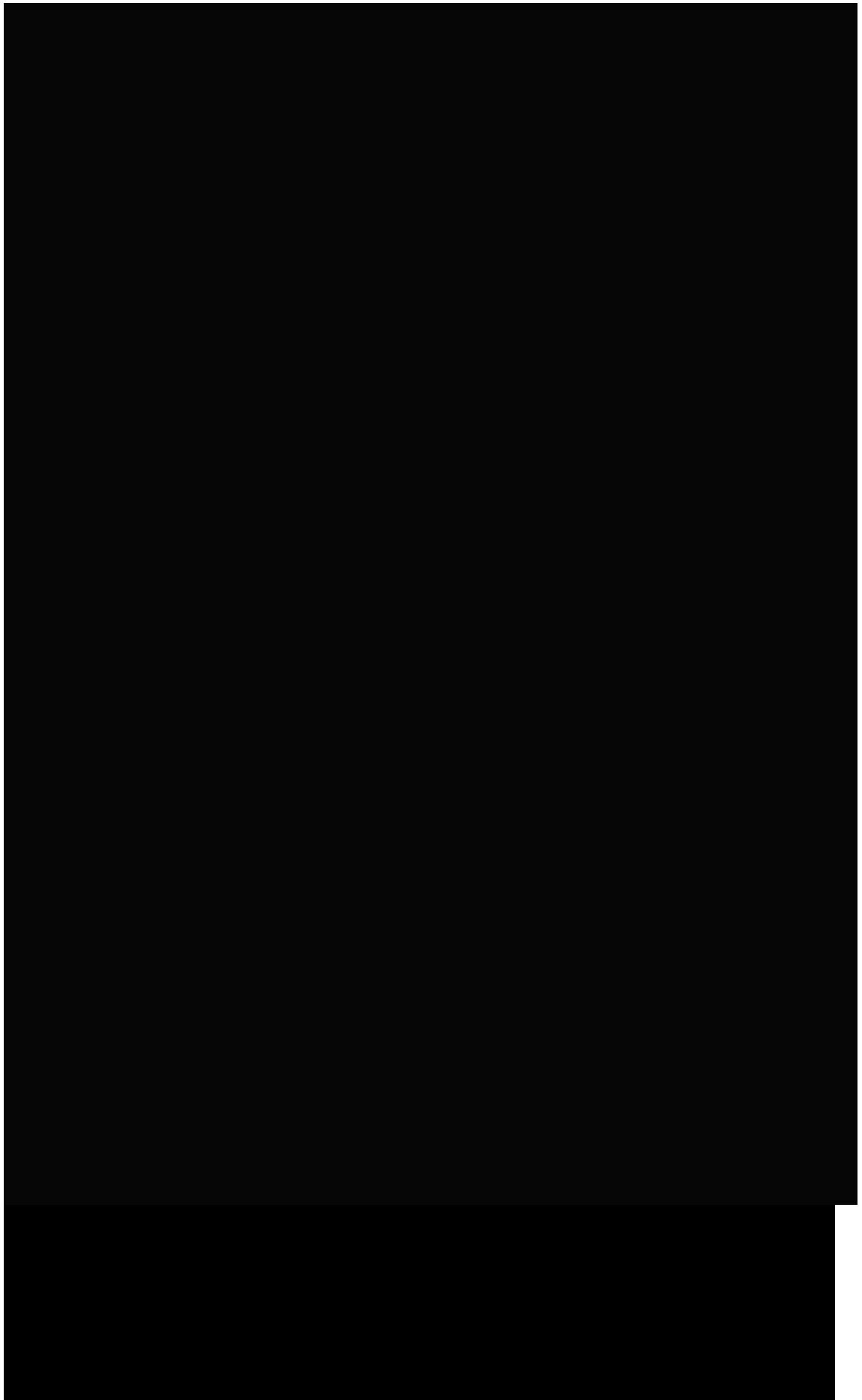


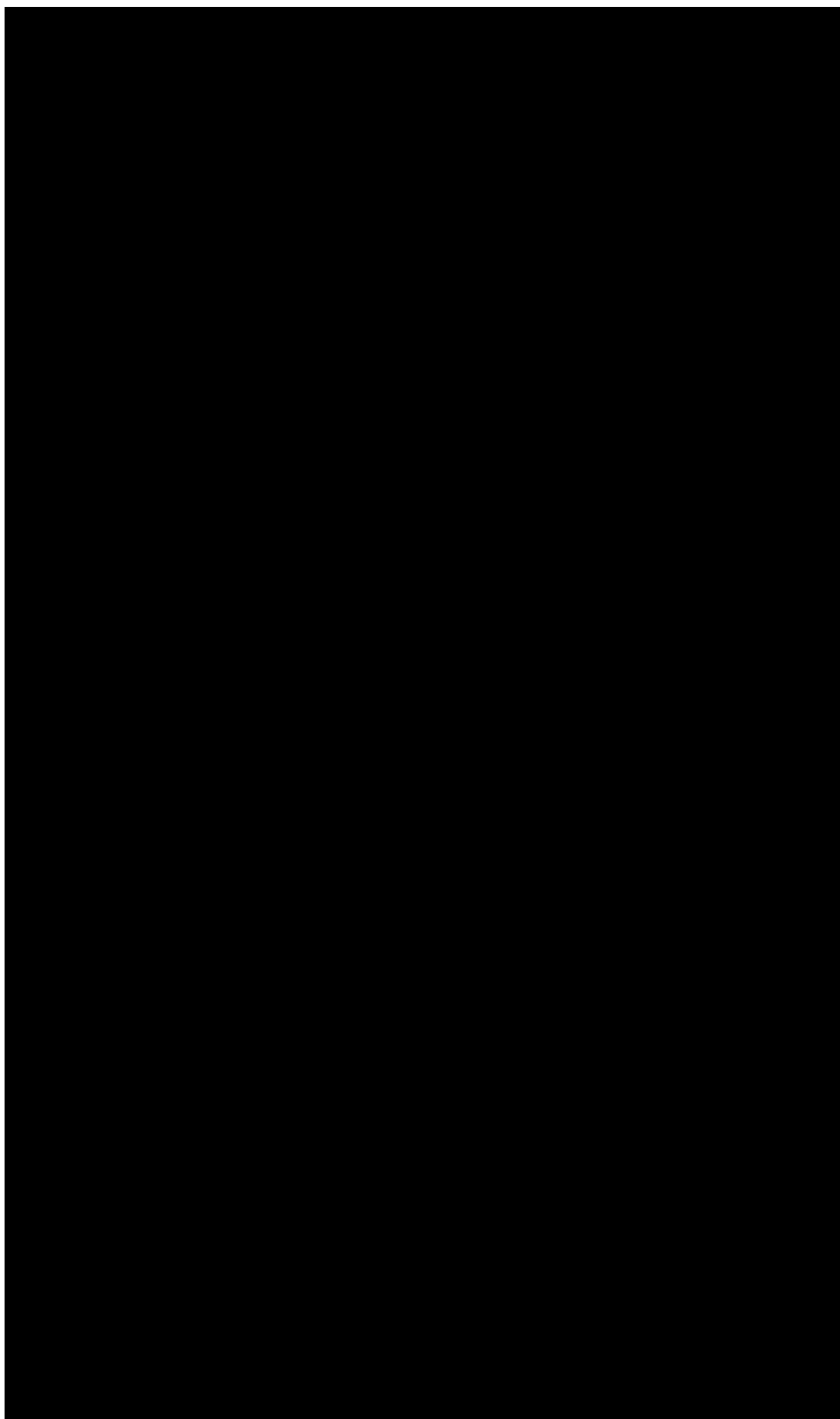


HIM

























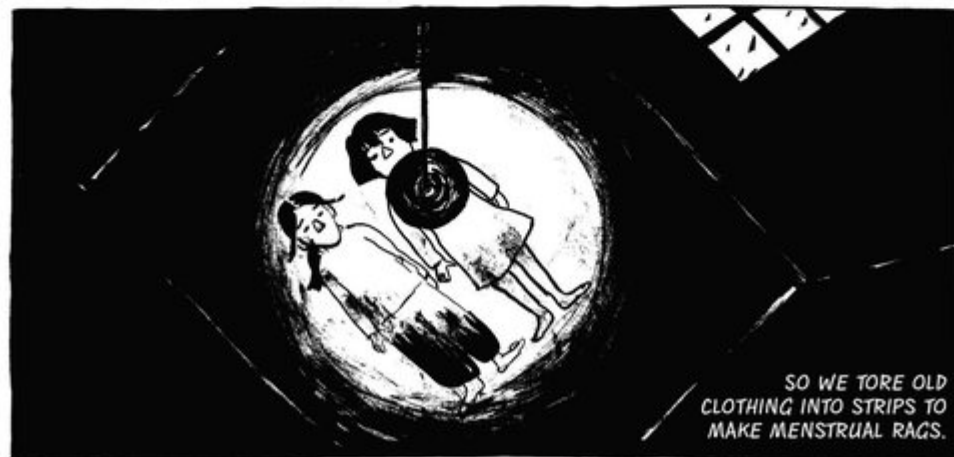
\*EONNI IS THE KOREAN WORD FOR OLDER SISTER USED BY A FEMALE.





















WHO COOKED  
AT THE STATION?

THERE WAS A KOREAN GIRL WHO DID ALL  
THE COOKING. THE GIRLS WHO SERVICED  
THE MEN DIDN'T HAVE TO COOK, CLEAN,  
OR LOOK AFTER THE FIRE.









EVEN THOUGH WE'D BEEN  
THERE FOR A WHILE, IT WAS  
STILL HARD TO STOMACH  
THE FOOD THEY GAVE US.

WE GOT STEAMED KAOLIANG  
AND MILLET WITH KIMCHI,  
RADISH LEAVES, AND CABBAGE.

BUT EVERYTHING WAS  
PRACTICALLY ROTTEN.

THEY GAVE  
YOU CLOTHES  
AT LEAST?



NO, WE HAD TO GET OUR OWN.



THERE WAS A GIRL WHO'D BEEN SOLD TO THE COMFORT STATION. WHERE DID SHE SAY SHE WAS FROM?



ANYWAY, SHE WAS KOREAN.



BUT BOY, WAS SHE HEARTLESS!  
SHE STOLE THINGS



AND SOLD US CLOTHES FOR MONEY.











MY DEBT WAS GROWING.  
I BARELY HAD ENOUGH TO  
EAT AND NOW I GOT MY  
PERIOD EVERY MONTH.



MY HEAD SPUN, AND THE SKY EVEN  
LOOKED YELLOW SOMETIMES.



AND IT FELT LIKE MY SPINE WAS GOING TO SNAP. ONE DAY I WASHED MY CLOTHES  
AND MY MENSTRUAL RAG AND WAS HANGING THEM ON THE LINE WHEN...





I SAW SOMEONE WAVING AT ME.



IT LOOKED LIKE THE SAME MAN



WHO HAD GIVEN ME  
HIS BUN THAT TIME.



HE SEEMED TO  
PLACE SOMETHING  
ON THE GROUND.



ONLY AFTER HE'D LEFT



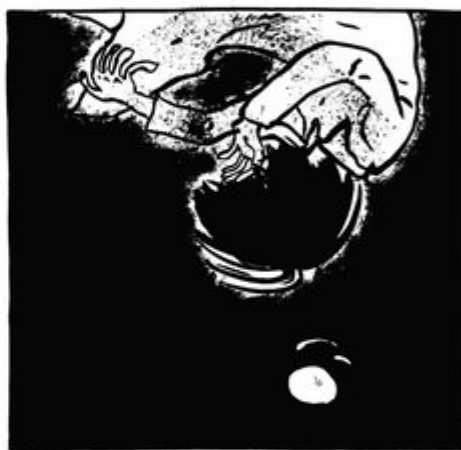
DID I GO CLOSER TO LOOK.



IT WAS A HARDBOILED EGG.



















SHIM YEONGSEOP



THAT WAS HIS NAME.



PLEASE TAKE  
THE EGG.



HE WAS GOOD TO ME.

YOU NEED TO  
KEEP UP YOUR  
STRENGTH.







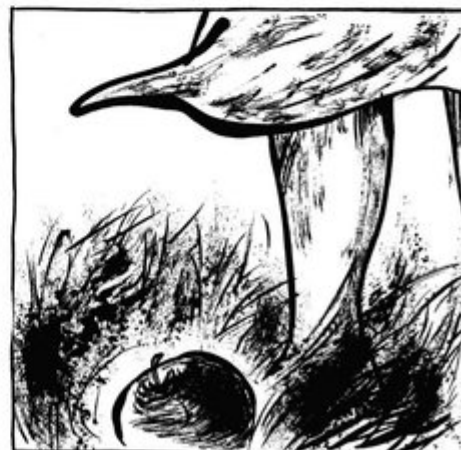
AT THE AIRPORT, BESIDES THE JAPANESE SOLDIERS  
AND US "COMFORT WOMEN," HUNDREDS OF KOREAN  
AND CHINESE MEN WORKED AS SLAVE LABORERS.

HE TURNED OUT TO  
BE THE CAPTAIN.



HE WAS NOTORIOUS  
AMONGST THE KOREANS.







I WAS FIFTEEN



AND HE WAS SEVENTEEN.



WHO KNOWS? MAYBE I WANTED  
TO LEAN ON SOMEBODY.















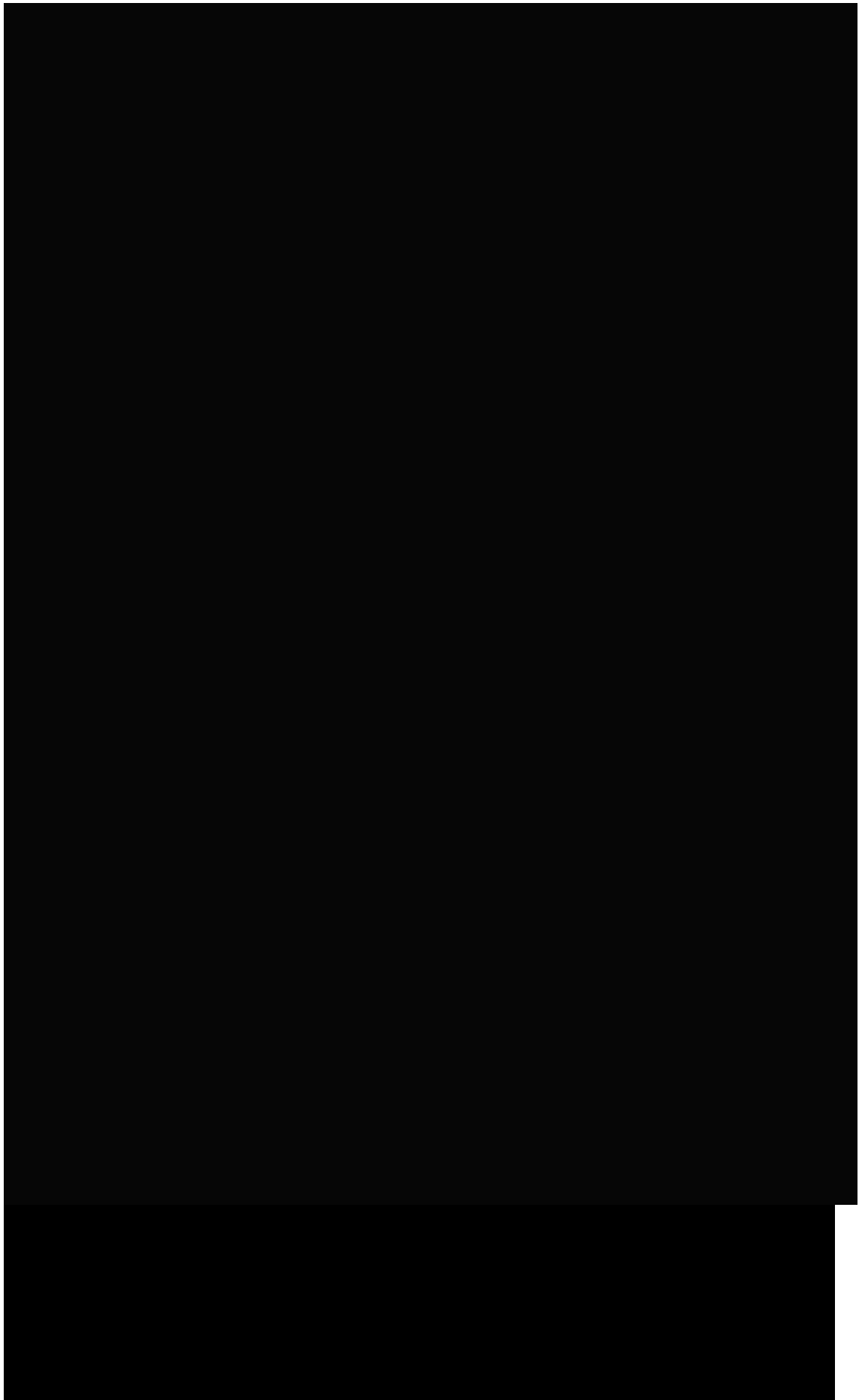


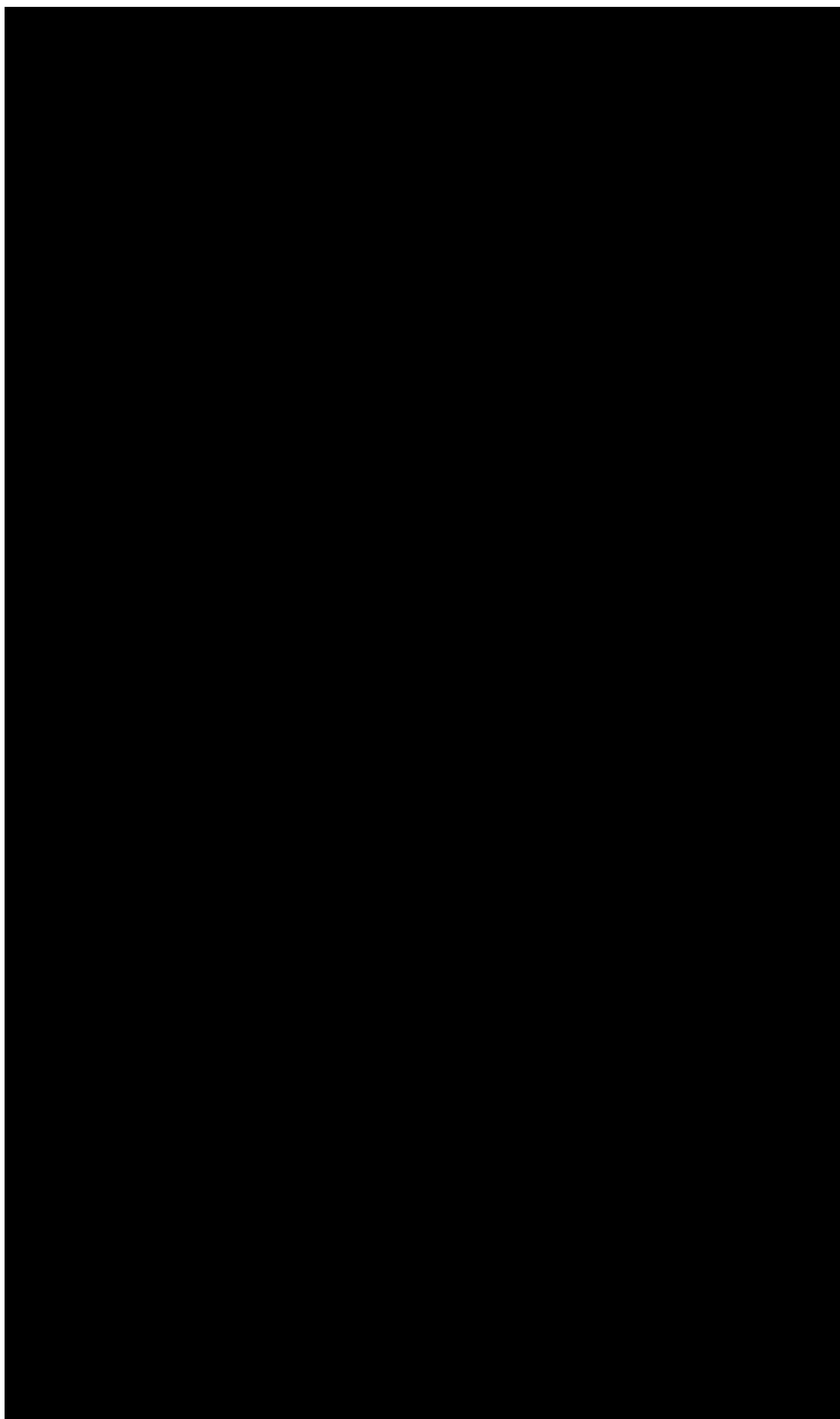




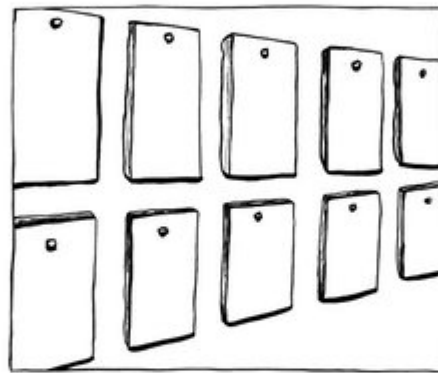




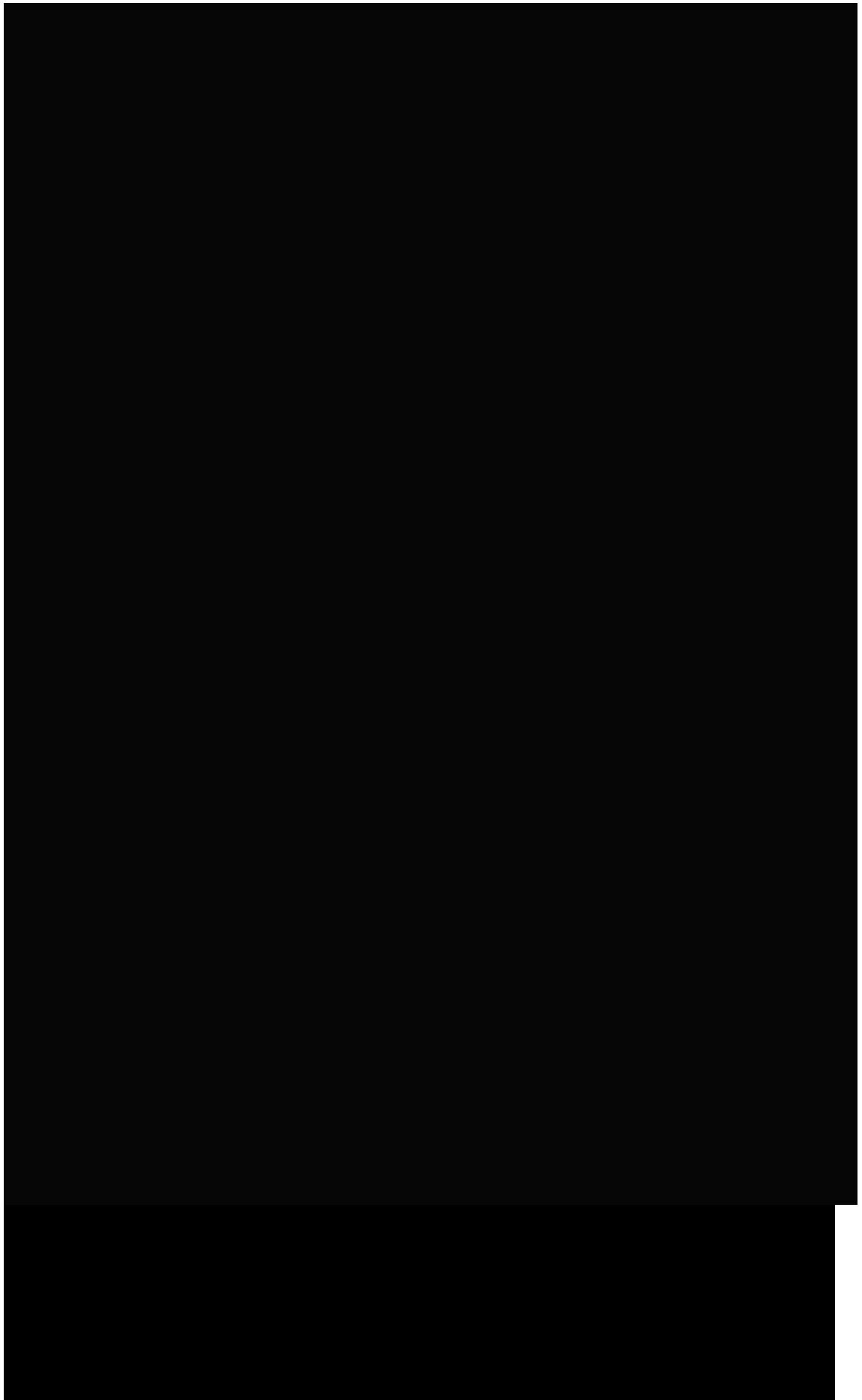


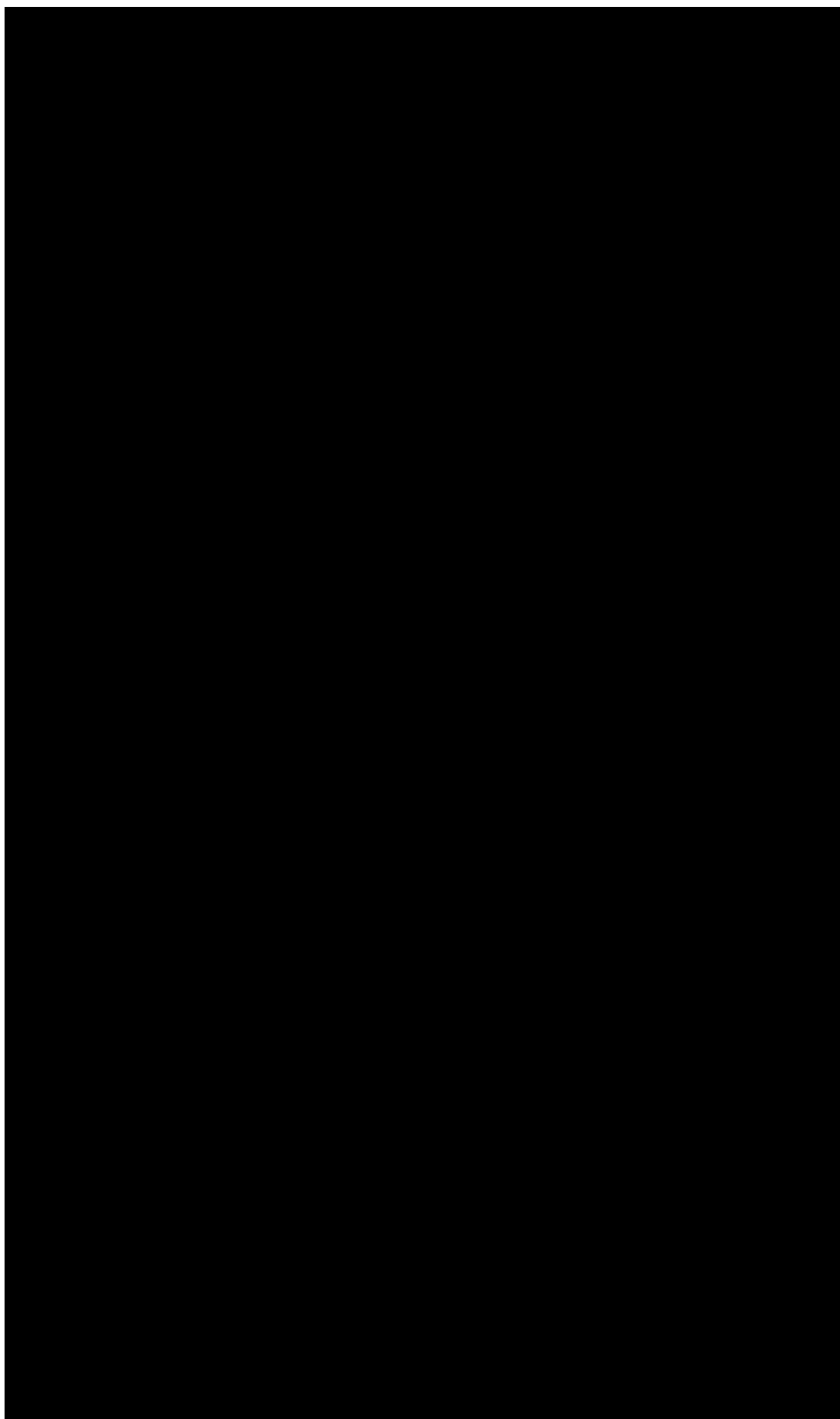


TO DOWNTOWN YANJI

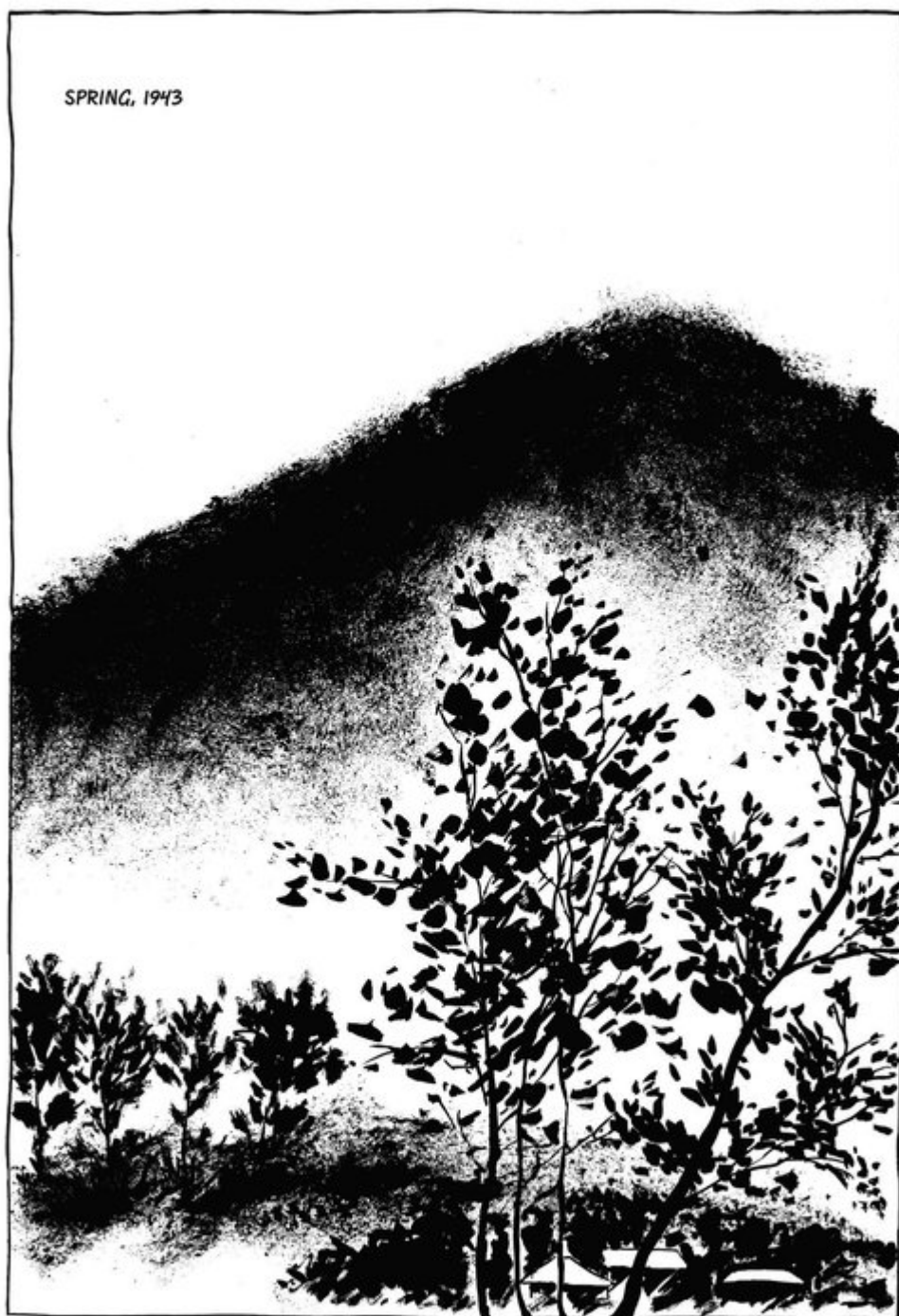








SPRING, 1943







IN THE SPRING OF 1943, BEFORE MY YEAR AT THE AIRPORT WAS UP, I WAS TRANSFERRED TO A COMFORT STATION NEAR THE CURRENT WEST MARKET IN YANJI. THEY CALLED IT DOWNTOWN, BUT THERE WEREN'T MANY HOUSES OR SHOPS. WE WERE SURROUNDED BY MOUNTAINS AND TREES.

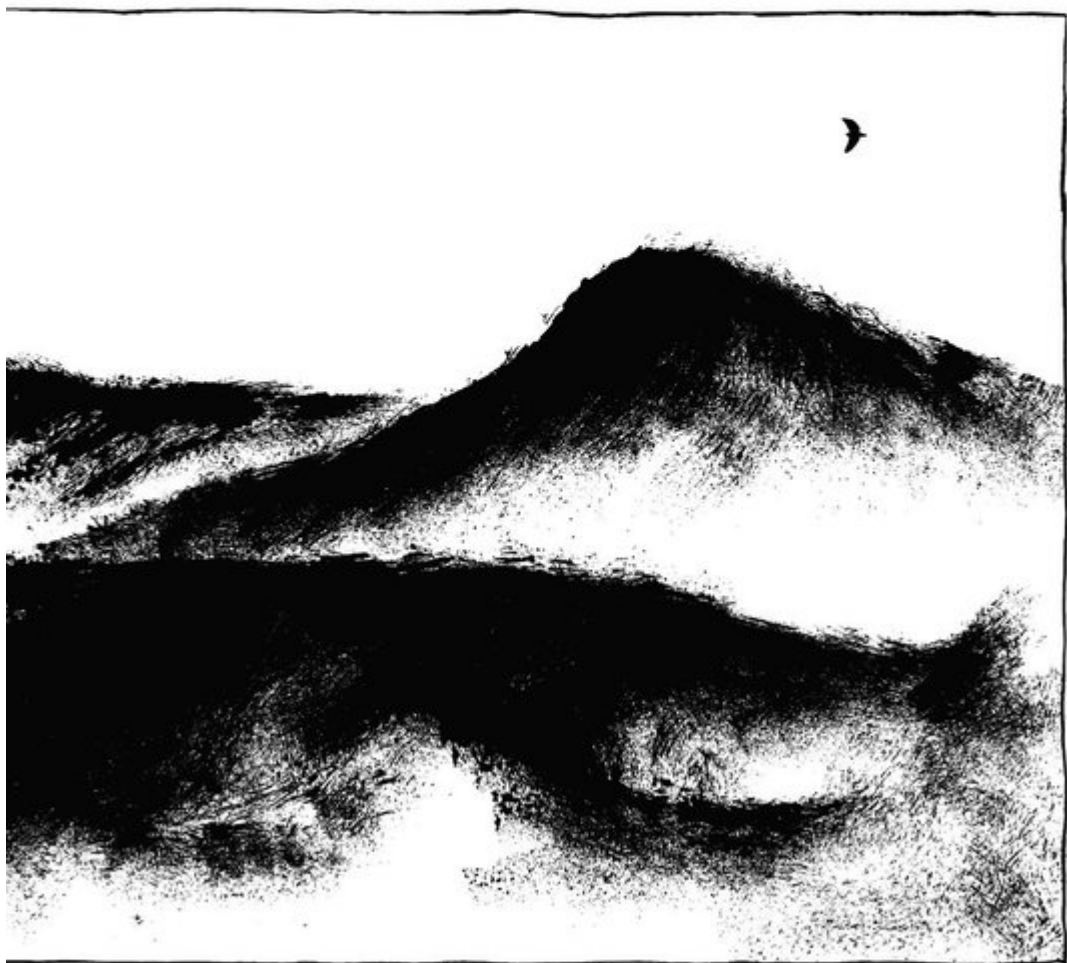


THERE WAS A JAPANESE POLICE STATION, A NEW SCHOOL, AND MANY JAPANESE MILITARY BASES SCATTERED HERE AND THERE. SINCE WE'D ALL BEEN MOVED SO SUDDENLY, I HAD NO WAY OF SEEING YEONGSEOP OPPA.\*



\*OPPA IS THE KOREAN WORD FOR OLDER BROTHER USED BY A FEMALE.

















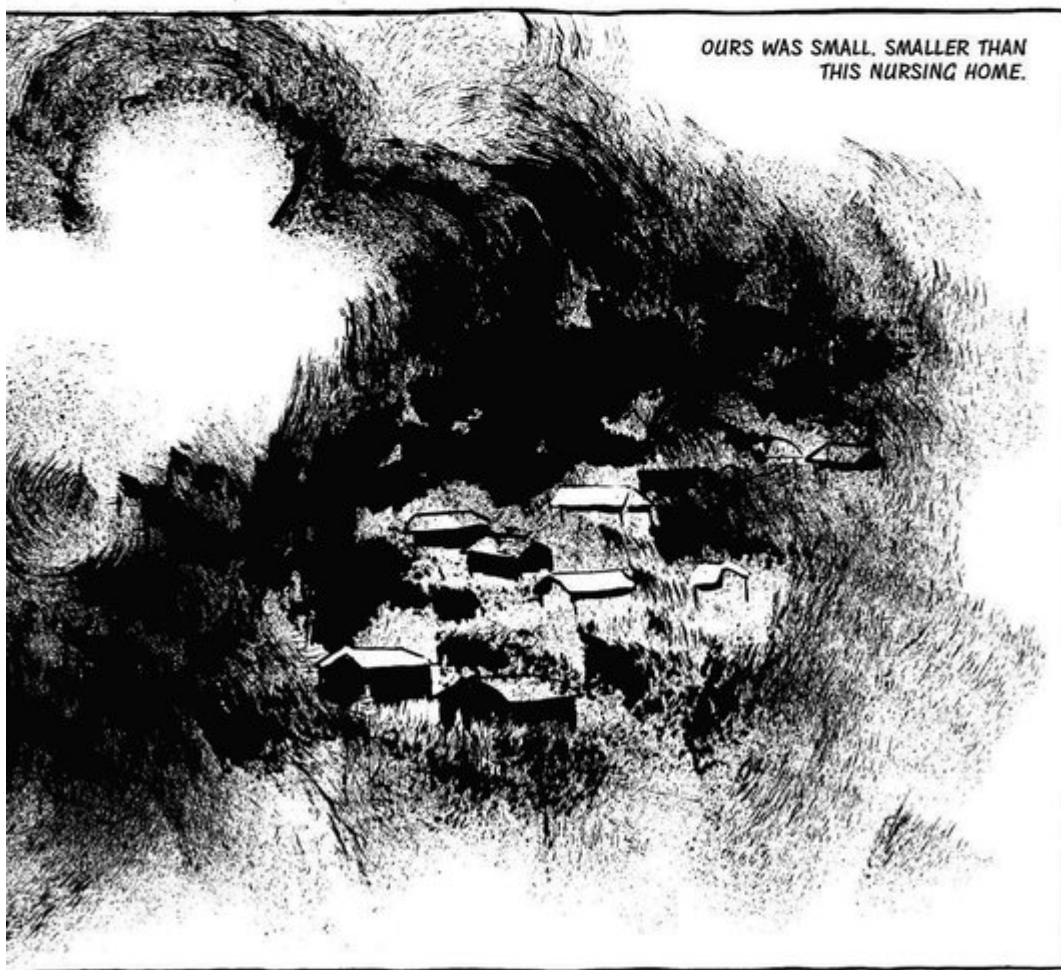
THE YANJI COMFORT STATION WAS A BIT FAR FROM THE MILITARY BASES. IT DIDN'T MATTER HOW MUCH MONEY SOMEONE HAD. ONLY SOLDIERS WERE ALLOWED TO COME TO THE STATION.



THERE WERE BIG AND SMALL COMFORT STATIONS. DOWNTOWN YANJI ALONE HAD TWO.



















ONCE THEY SAW I WAS FINE,  
THE OTHER GIRLS CAME IN, TOO. IT  
WAS SO NICE TO TAKE A BATH AGAIN.





WHEN WE CAME OUT OF THE BATH,  
THE STATION MANAGER GAVE EACH  
OF US A BUNDLE.



CHANGE  
INTO THESE.



I PAID FOR THEM,  
SINCE YOU GIRLS  
HAVE NO MONEY.



WORK  
HARD TO  
SERVICE  
THOSE  
SOLDIERS.

BRING IN  
LOTS OF  
MONEY. THEN  
YOU CAN PAY  
OFF YOUR  
DEBTS



AND  
GO HOME.



HOME?

HOME...

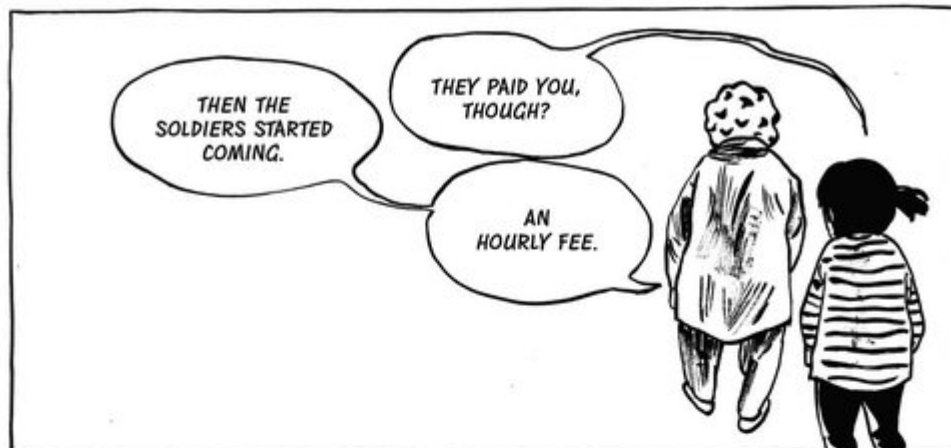
HOME FELT SO  
FAR AWAY.





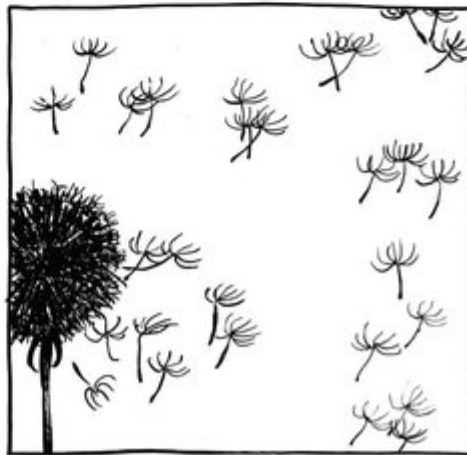




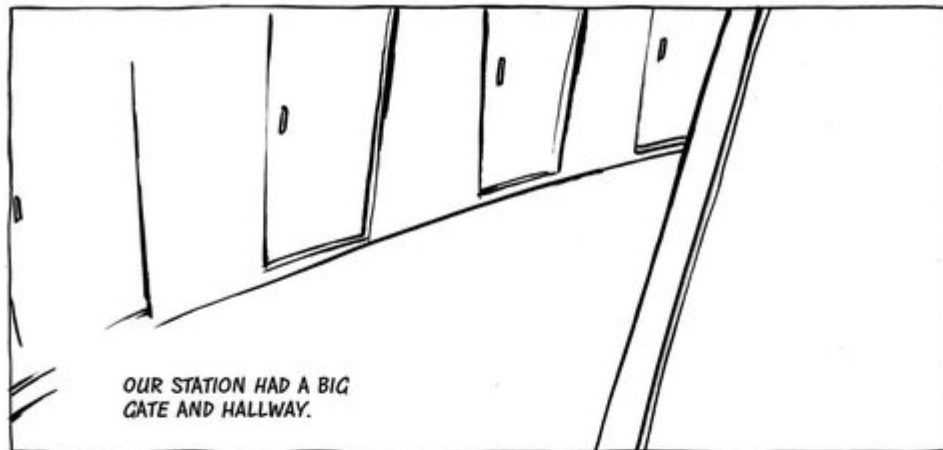












OUR STATION HAD A BIG  
GATE AND HALLWAY.



THERE WERE NO  
SET HOURS.



THE SOLDIERS CAME  
WHenever THEY WANTED.



FEWER CAME  
DURING THE  
WEEK.



BUT THEY HAD  
SUNDAYS OFF



SO THAT'S WHEN THEY  
CAME IN DROVES.



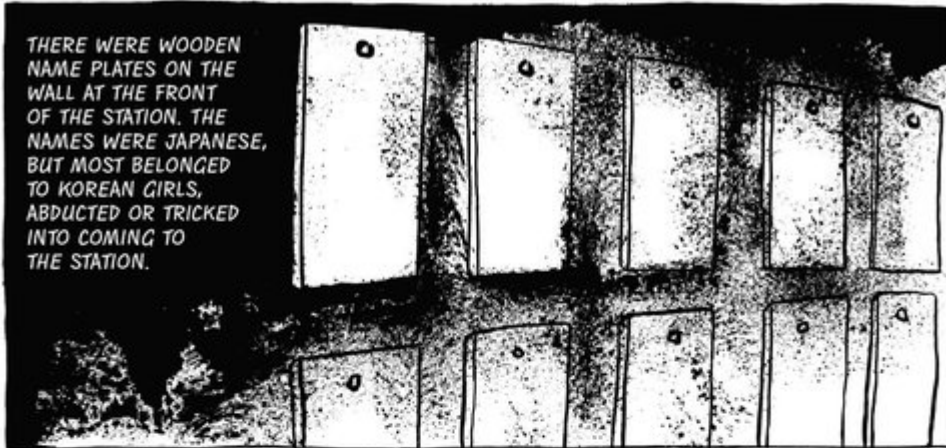








THERE WERE WOODEN  
NAME PLATES ON THE  
WALL AT THE FRONT  
OF THE STATION. THE  
NAMES WERE JAPANESE,  
BUT MOST BELONGED  
TO KOREAN GIRLS,  
ABDUCTED OR TRICKED  
INTO COMING TO  
THE STATION.



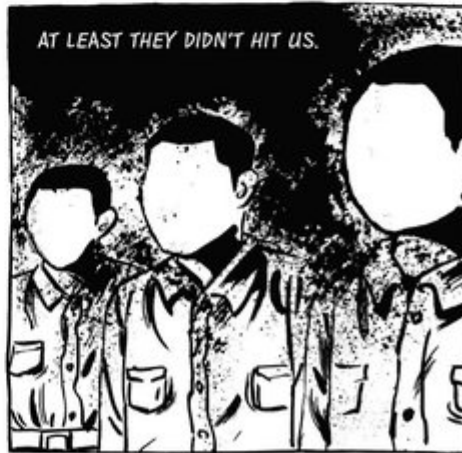
THE SOLDIERS CHOSE THE GIRLS THEY WANTED  
BY LOOKING AT THE NAME PLATES.



MOST OF THE JAPANESE  
SOLDIERS WERE YOUNG, TOO.

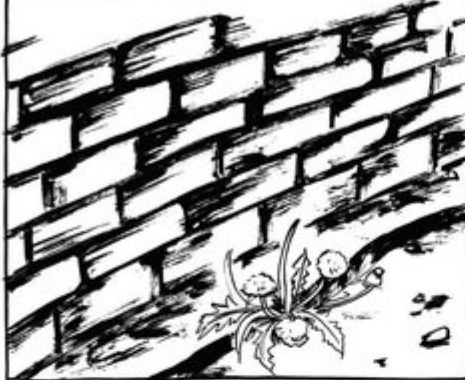


AT LEAST THEY DIDN'T HIT US.





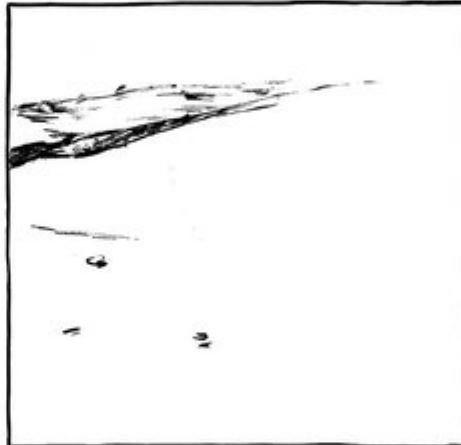
THE HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS WERE THE VIOLENT ONES.



ONCE AN OFFICER SAID HE DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY I LOOKED AT HIM AND STARTED BEATING ME.

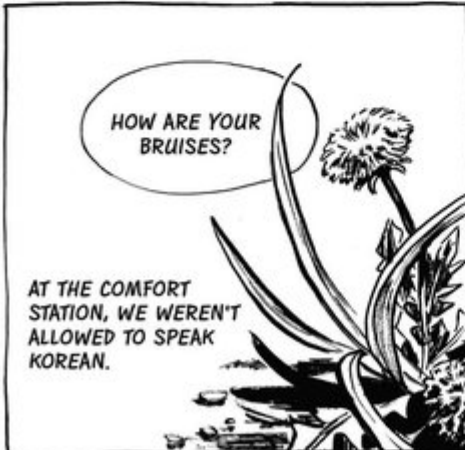


ANOTHER TIME I LOOKED DIRECTLY AT A COMMANDER, SO HE BEAT ME.



HOW ARE YOUR  
BRUISES?

AT THE COMFORT  
STATION, WE WEREN'T  
ALLOWED TO SPEAK  
KOREAN.



STILL WE SECRETLY WHISPERED  
TO EACH OTHER.

WHEN WILL  
WE ESCAPE  
THIS HELL?

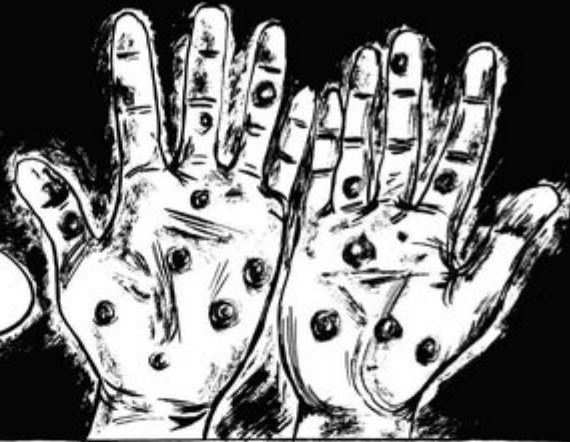




THEN ONE DAY...

WHAT'S  
THIS?

WHAT'S WRONG  
WITH MY HANDS?



I'D GOTTEN SYPHILIS.

I BECAME SO SWOLLEN DOWN  
THERE THAT I COULDN'T RECEIVE  
ANY SOLDIERS.

ONLY THEN DID THE STATION MANAGERS  
SEND ME TO THE MILITARY HOSPITAL.



THERE I RECEIVED THE NO. 606 SHOT.\*



\*NO. 606 INJECTIONS, ALSO KNOWN AS SALVARSAN, WERE USED  
TO TREAT SYPHILIS AND OTHER VENEREAL DISEASES.



WHEN I DIDN'T GET BETTER  
FOR TWO MONTHS



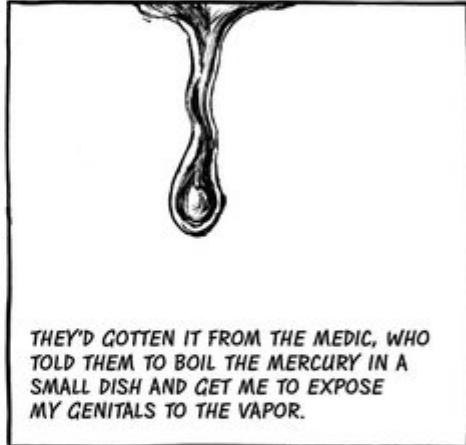
THE MANAGERS GOT DESPERATE, SINCE I  
COULDN'T MAKE THEM ANY MONEY.



THEY GOT A HOLD OF  
SOME MERCURY.



THEY'D GOTTEN IT FROM THE MEDIC, WHO  
TOLD THEM TO BOIL THE MERCURY IN A  
SMALL DISH AND GET ME TO EXPOSE  
MY GENITALS TO THE VAPOR.



SO THE MANAGERS FORCED ME TO COVER  
MY FACE AND SQUAT NAKED OVER THE  
BOILING MERCURY.



I GOT BETTER EVENTUALLY, BUT BECAUSE  
OF THAT, I COULD NEVER HAVE ANY CHILDREN.



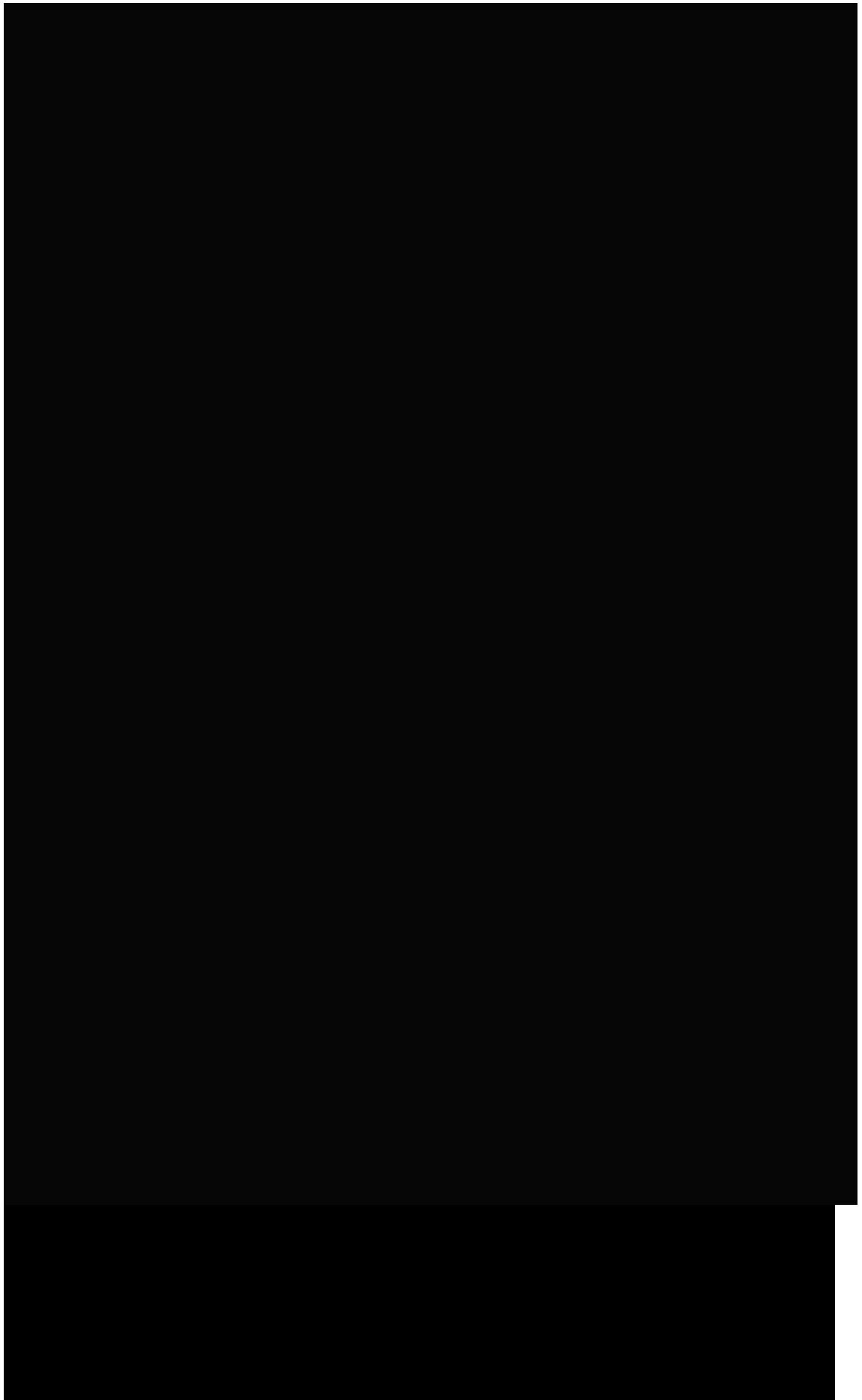


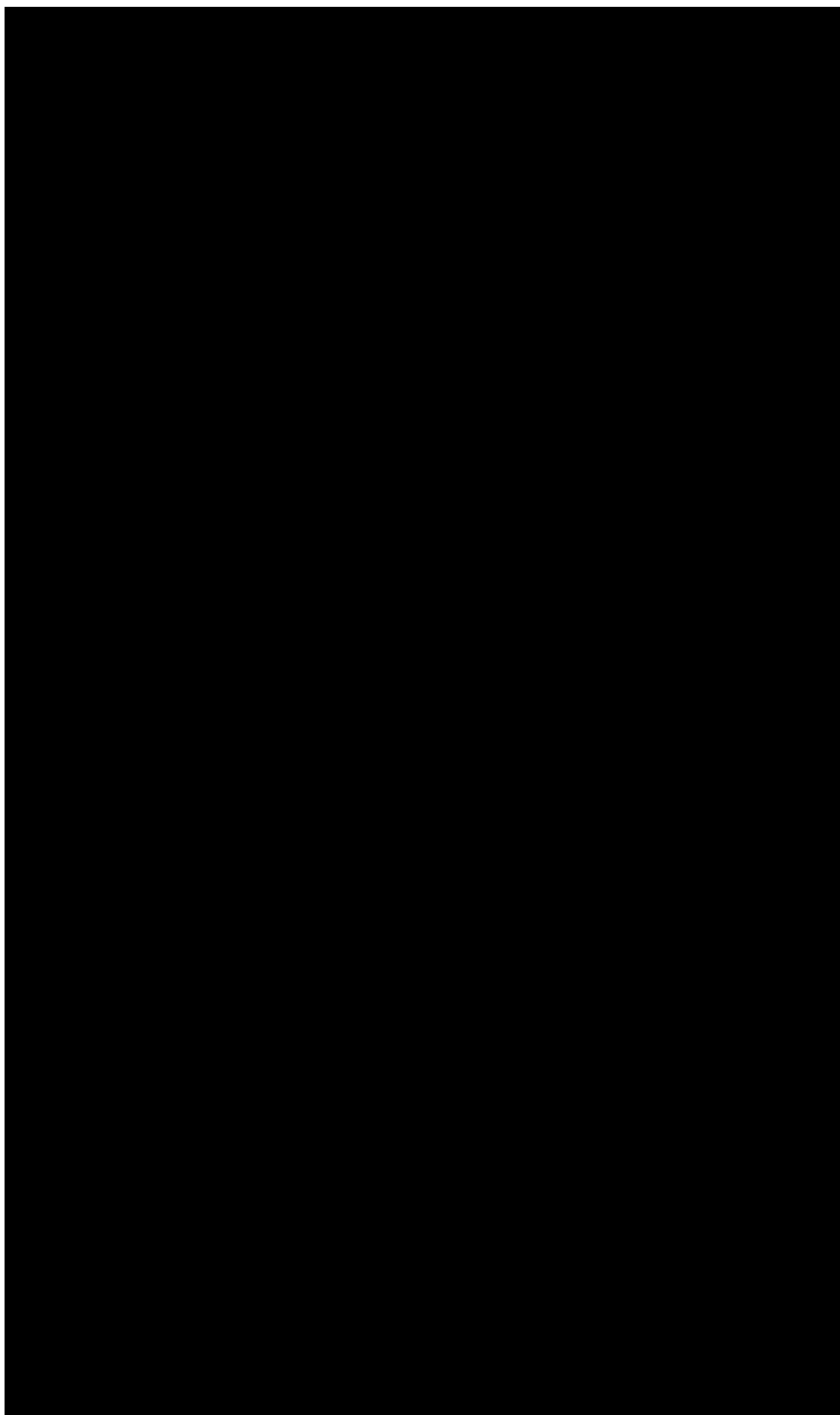










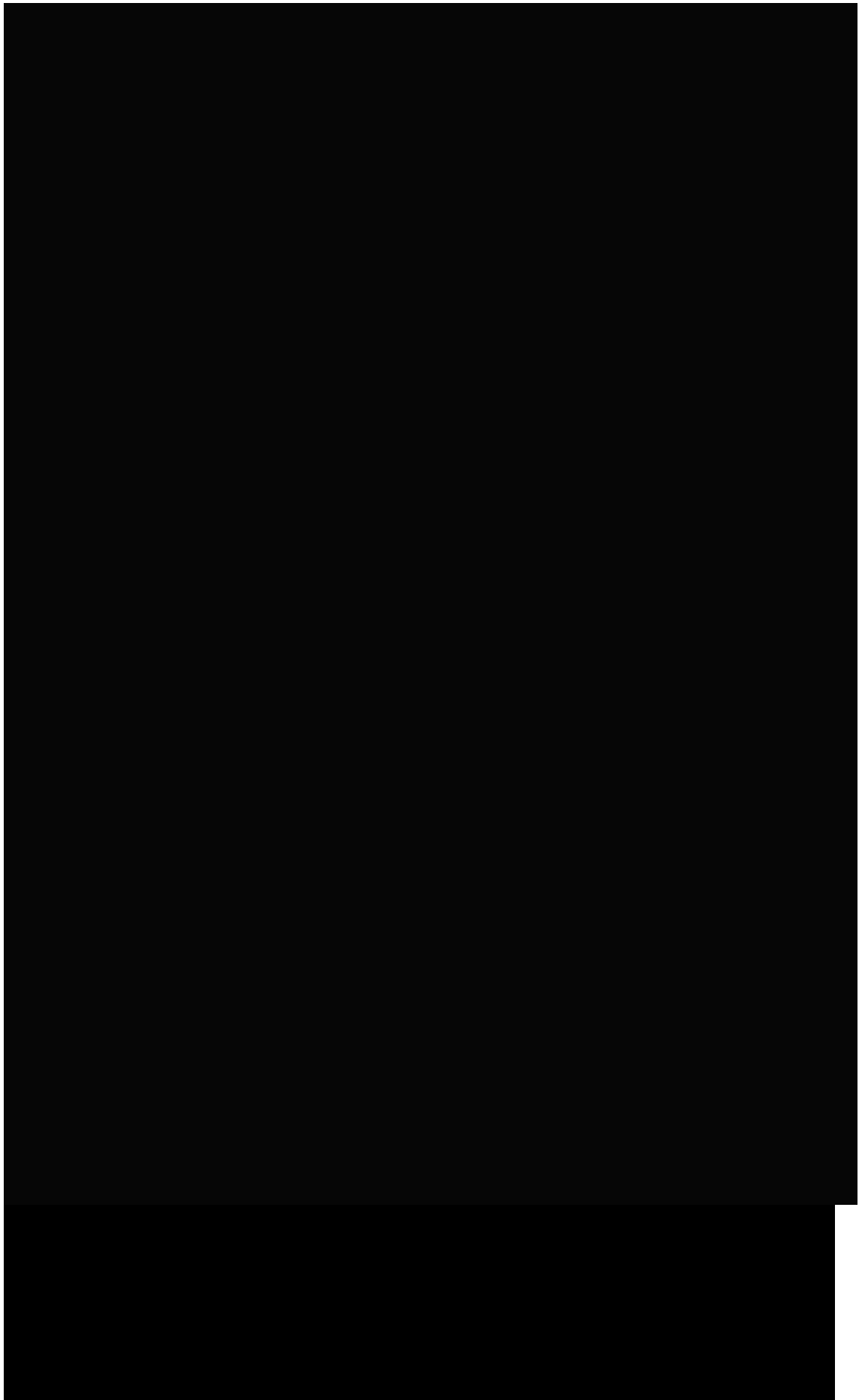


## BIG SIS MIJA







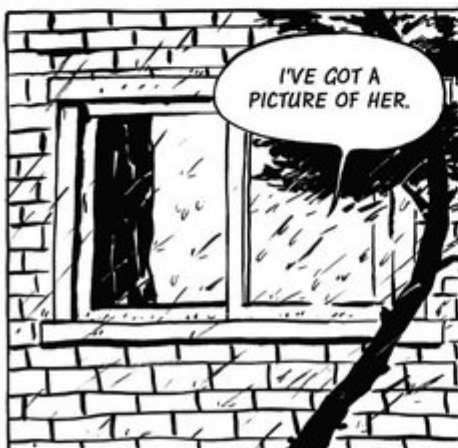




THE HOUSE OF SHARING,  
GYEONGGI PROVINCE

























MIJA EONNI ARRIVED AT  
THE COMFORT STATION AT  
THE EAST YANJI AIRPORT ABOUT  
A MONTH AFTER I DID.

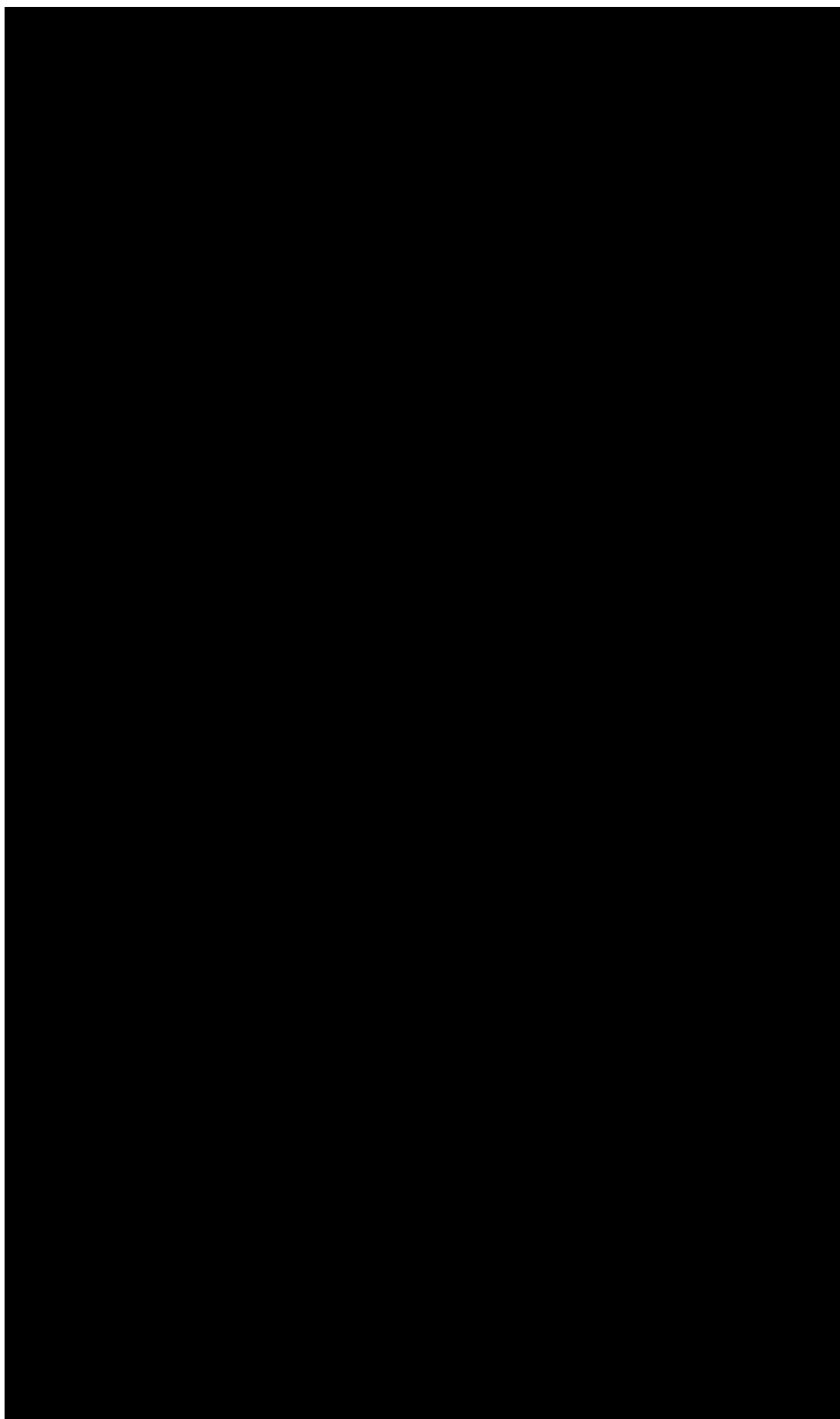


SHE WAS SEVERAL  
YEARS OLDER  
THAN ME.

SIGN: MUSEUM OF SEXUAL SLAVERY BY JAPANESE MILITARY













SEO MIJA...





SHE SAID SHE WAS FROM  
GYEONGGI PROVINCE.



HER FAMILY WAS SO POOR THAT WHEN SHE WAS FOUR, HER ENTIRE FAMILY HAD TO SPLIT UP.





HER FATHER WAS A SHARECROPPER WITH NOTHING TO HIS NAME.



WHEN HE COULDN'T DELIVER THE HARVEST IN TIME, YOU THINK THE LANDOWNER WAS UNDERSTANDING?



THE LANDLORD THREATENED TO SET FIRE TO ALL THE CROPS.



THE LANDLORD KICKED THEM OUT. HER PARENTS TOOK THE YOUNGEST AND SOLD THEMSELVES INTO BOND-SERVICE. MIJA EONNI WAS SENT TO HER FATHER'S BIG BROTHER.







BUT HER UNCLE AND HIS FAMILY HAD  
FALLEN ON HARD TIMES, JUST LIKE  
EVERYONE ELSE.



SHE TRIED TO EARN HER KEEP BY  
DOING CHORES AND LOOKING AFTER  
HER NEPHEW.



SHE LIVED THERE FOR TWO YEARS,  
AND WHEN SHE TURNED SIX, SHE WAS  
MARRIED OFF AS A CHILD BRIDE



TO A NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD MAN IN A  
NEIGHBORING VILLAGE.



SHE WORKED THERE FOR  
ANOTHER TWO YEARS.



THERE WAS NOTHING TO EAT, SO SHE  
SOMETIMES TORE LEAVES OFF OAK TREES  
AND BOILED THEM WITH MILLET TO MAKE  
PORRIDGE.









IN THE END, SHE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GO WORK AS A BONDMAID AT THE LANDLORD'S HOUSE.



SHE DID CHORES ALL DAY



AND TOOK CARE OF THEIR BABY AT NIGHT.



IF THE MISSUS WAS HOT, MIJA EONNI FANNED HER.



IF THE MISSUS WANTED A MASSAGE, MIJA EONNI GAVE HER ONE.



SHE WASHED THE MISSUS'S FEET AND LAID OUT HER BEDDING.





WHEN SHE WAS ABOUT THIRTEEN, SHE FOUND HER LIFE AS A BONDMAID SO HELLISH THAT SHE RAN AWAY.



BEFORE GOING TO SEOUL, SHE STOPPED BY HER HOUSE, BUT NO ONE WAS HOME. SINCE IT WAS SUMMER, THEY WERE PROBABLY WORKING IN THE FIELD.



HER LITTLE SISTER WASN'T HOME EITHER. SHE HAD MOST LIKELY FOLLOWED THEIR MOTHER OUT TO THE FIELD.



SHE SCOOPED OUT SOME RICE FROM THE CROCK AND THEN BLINDLY GOT ON A BUS.















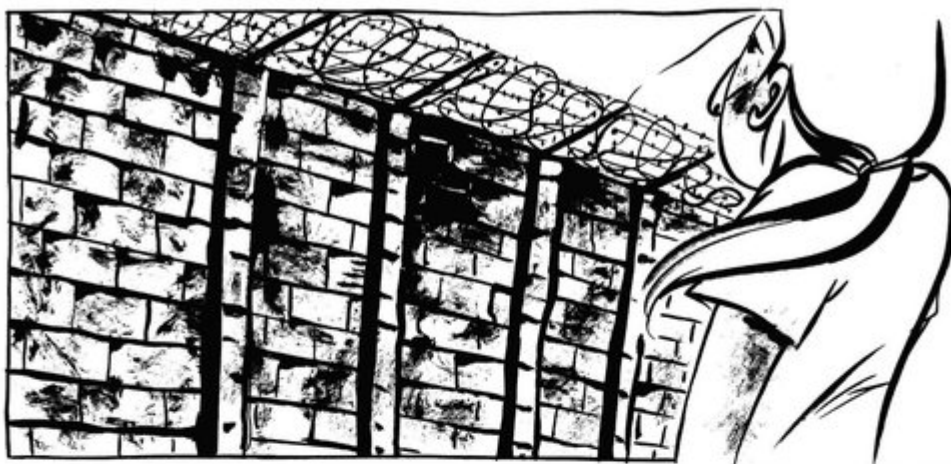






























IT WAS A GIRL.

BUT WHEN SHE CAME BACK  
FROM THE BATHROOM, THE BABY  
WAS GONE. THE MANAGERS  
HAD SOLD HER BABY OFF TO A  
CHILDLESS JAPANESE COUPLE.









BEFORE SHE COULD HEAL PROPERLY, SHE WAS  
FORCED TO RECEIVE SOLDIERS AGAIN.

AFTER RECEIVING THE MEN, SO MUCH BLOOD  
WOULD FLOW FROM DOWN THERE THAT SHE  
COULDN'T WALK AROUND.











AFTER KOREA'S LIBERATION, SHE AND I WENT OUR SEPARATE WAYS. IT LOOKED LIKE WE WOULD STARVE TO DEATH IF WE KEPT ROAMING THE STREETS TOGETHER.





SHE WANDERED THE STREETS AND LUCKILY MET AN ELDERLY KOREAN MAN BY THE LAST NAME OF SEO. HE TOOK HER BACK TO HIS HOUSE WHERE HE LIVED WITH HIS WIFE.



THE OLD COUPLE TREATED HER LIKE THEIR OWN DAUGHTER, ESPECIALLY SINCE SHE HAD THE SAME LAST NAME AS THEM.



SHE LIVED WITH THEM FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS. THEN ONE DAY



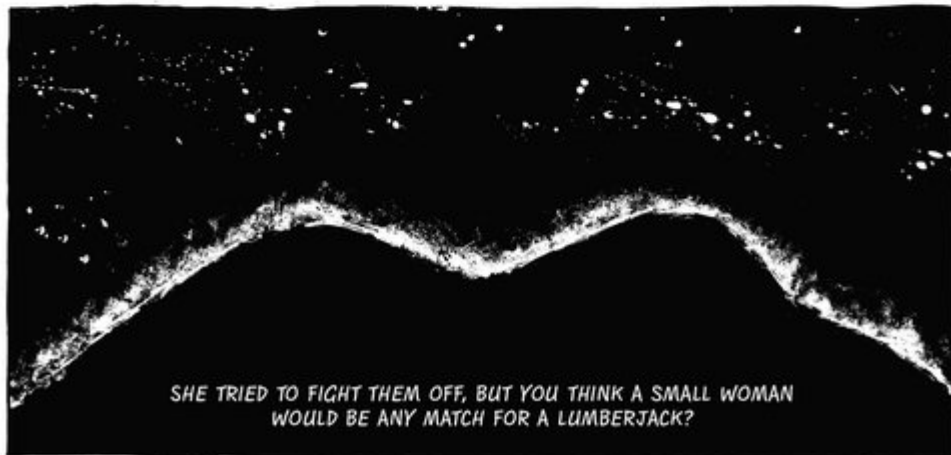
THE OLD WOMAN TOLD HER TO GO HOME.

















A MONTH OR TWO LATER,  
SHE WAS PREGNANT AGAIN.



BUT SHE DIDN'T KNOW  
WHO THE FATHER WAS,  
THOUGH HE WAS KOREAN.

YOU SEE, THE FIRST  
WAVE OF WORKERS  
HAD LEFT AND  
NEW ONES  
HAD COME.





AND THEY'D TURNED OUT TO BE ALL THE SAME.





SHE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GO BACK TO THE  
OLD COUPLE TO ASK FOR HELP.



AIGO, MIJA!  
AGAIN?



HER BELLY WAS GROWING BIGGER,  
BUT SHE COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT  
OF HAVING ANOTHER KID WITH NO FATHER.





THE OLD WOMAN PLACED A LARGE ROCK ON  
TOP OF MIJA EONNI'S BELLY, BUT THE BABY  
STILL CLUNG TO LIFE.



MIJA EONNI ROLLED DOWN A  
HILL AND DID ALL SORTS OF  
THINGS TO LOSE THE BABY,  
BUT NOTHING WORKED.

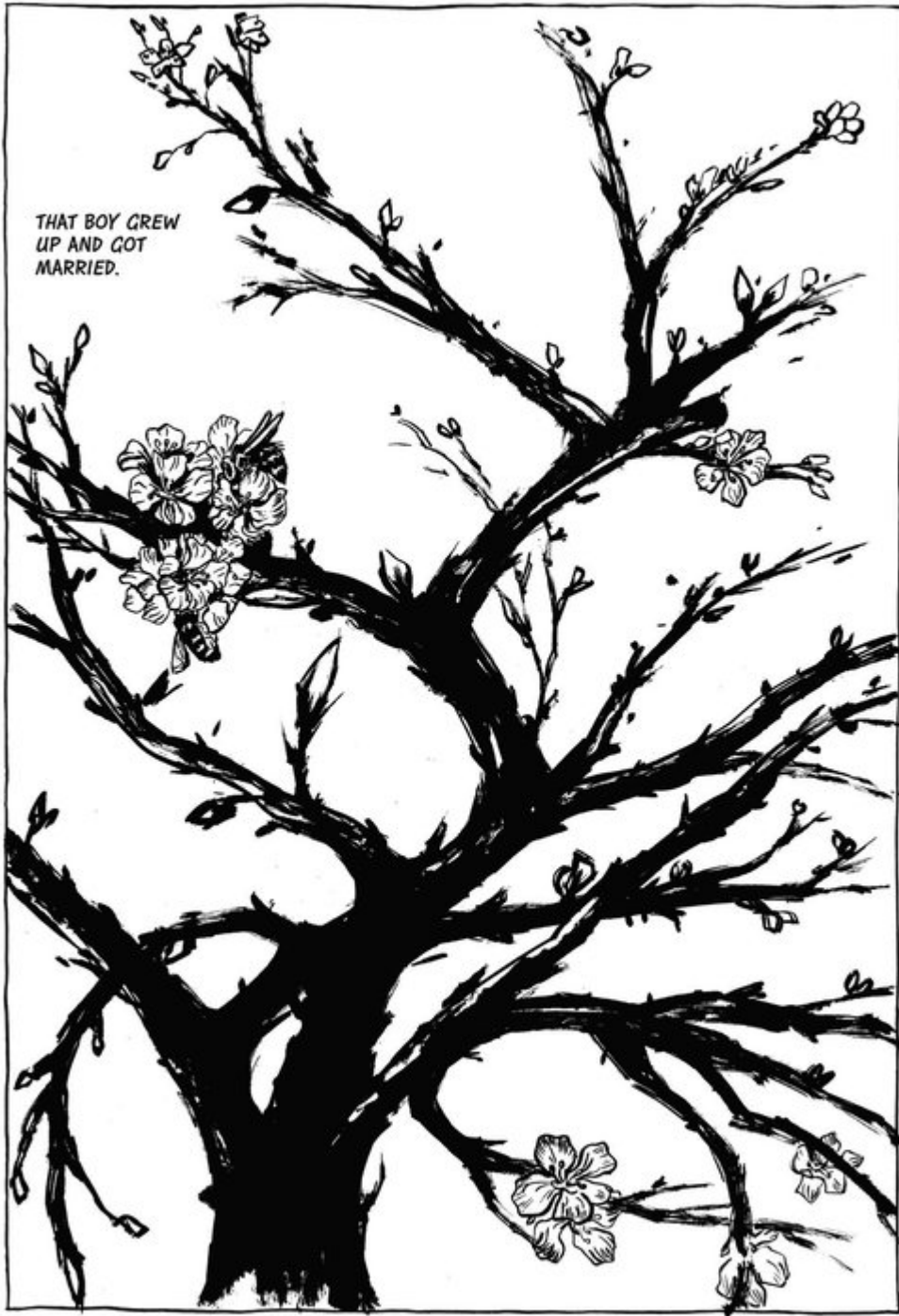
IN THE END,  
SHE HAD A BOY.







THAT BOY GREW  
UP AND GOT  
MARRIED.





HE HAD A BOY AND GIRL. THE LITTLE BOY  
WAS FINE, BUT THE GIRL WAS ALWAYS SICK.  
AROUND THAT TIME, MIJA EONNI'S BIG  
BROTHER GOT IN TOUCH WITH HER.  
AFTER BECOMING SUCCESSFUL IN KOREA,  
HE'D BEEN LOOKING FOR HER.



SHE RETURNED TO KOREA, DETERMINED TO  
GET HER GRANDDAUGHTER HELP.





MIJA EONNI WAS A LITTLE SMALLER THAN ME.  
SHE HAD AN OUTFIT CUSTOM-MADE BEFORE  
SHE DIED, BUT THE BLAZER WAS A BIT LOOSE,  
SO I INHERITED IT. I STILL HAVE IT.

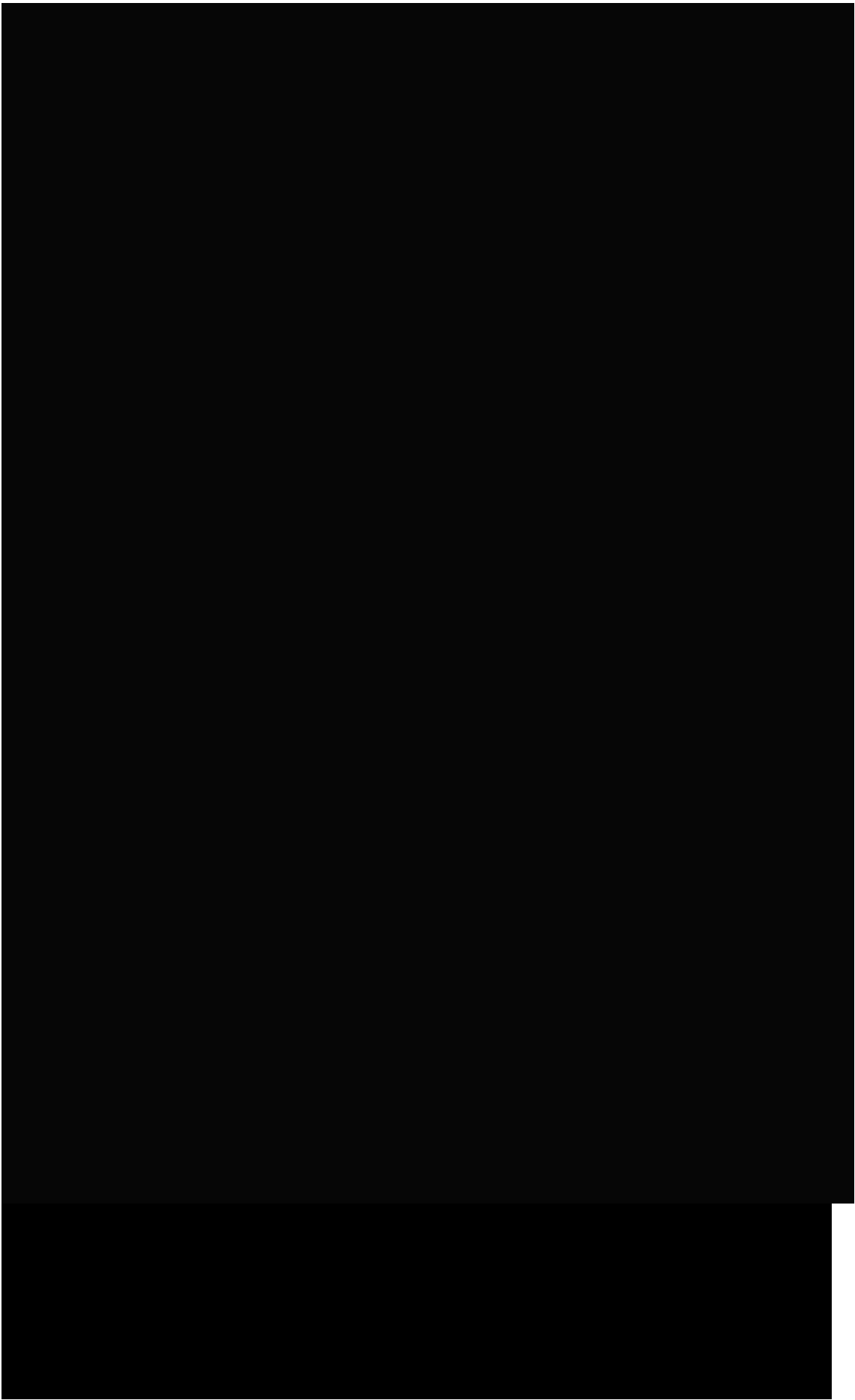


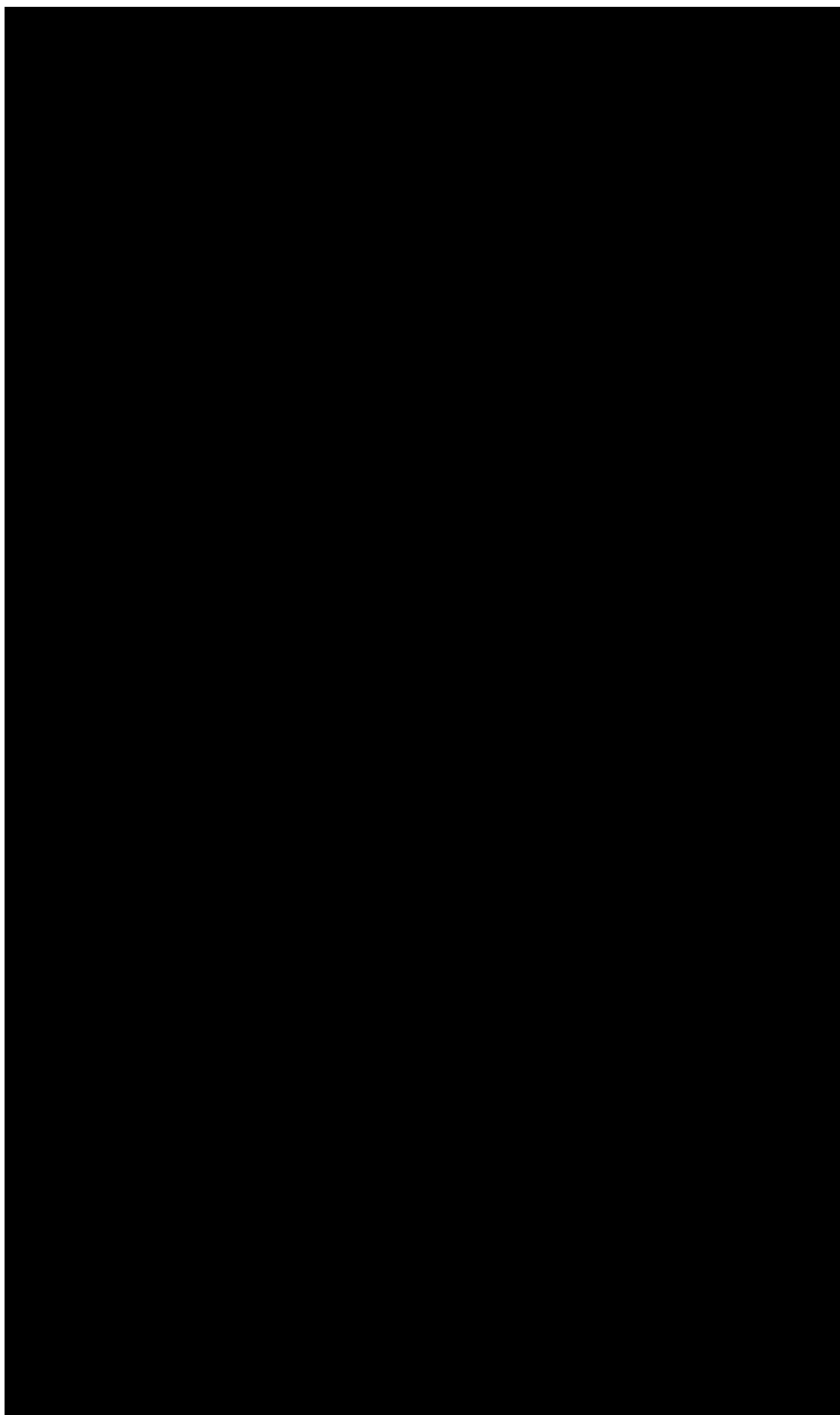




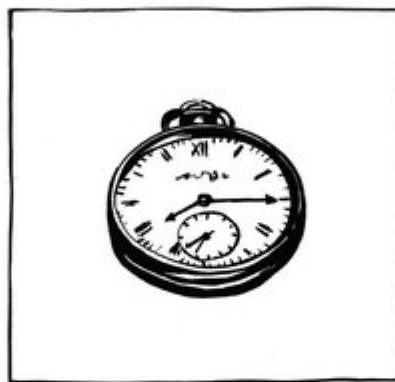




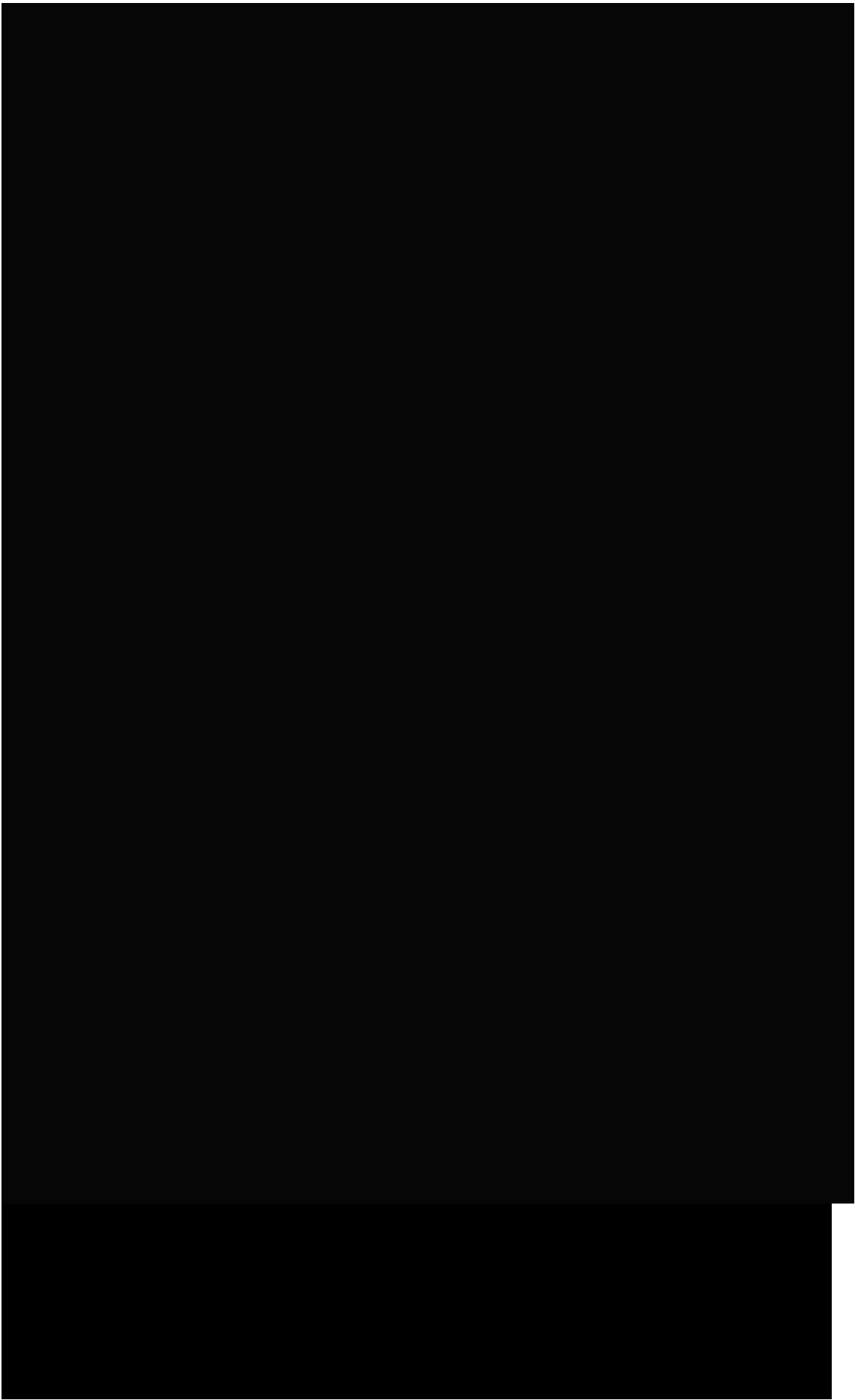


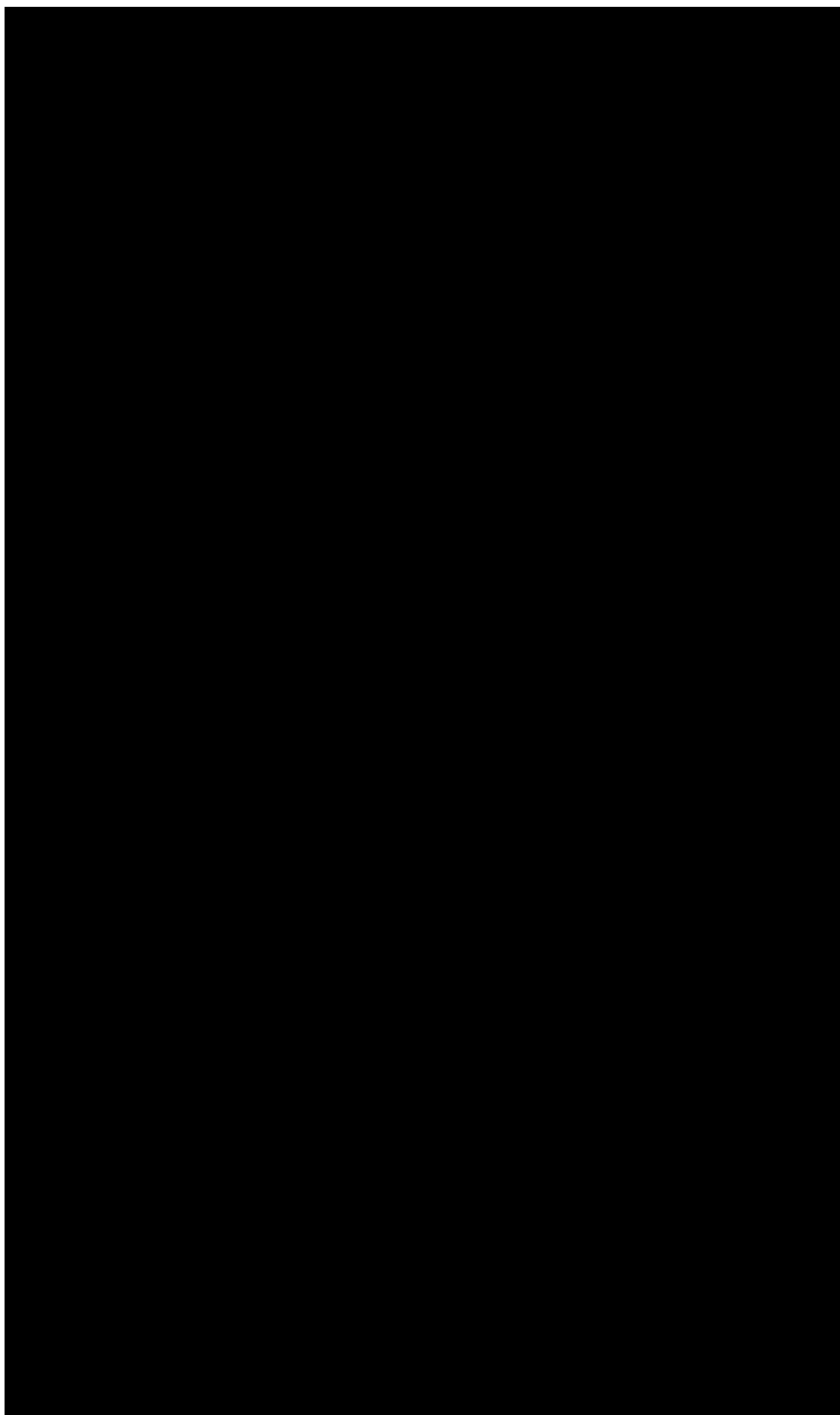


## A JAPANESE SOLDIER





























THEY'D TAKE OFF  
THEIR BELTS AND  
WHIP US.

ONCE THEY  
DRAGGED ME OUT OF  
BED IN THE MIDDLE  
OF THE NIGHT

AND  
PUNCHED ME UNTIL  
MY NOSE BLED.

IT HURT SO BAD  
I REALLY THOUGHT  
I WAS GONNA DIE.

I WAS BEATEN A LOT,  
SINCE I WAS IN  
THE MANAGERS'  
BAD BOOKS.





ONE DAY THEY SENT ME ON AN ERRAND.



THEY TOLD ME TO GO TO THE STORE TO  
BUY SOMETHING.



KEEP MY  
HEAD DOWN.

DON'T MAKE  
EYE CONTACT.



JUST LET ME PASS,  
JUST LET ME PASS,  
PLEASE, JUST LET ME  
PASS...



YOU!









AFTER THAT, I COULDN'T FORGET MY  
HOMETOWN ADDRESS, EVEN IF I TRIED.

DOESN'T MATTER  
HOW MUCH YOU HIT ME.  
IT WON'T CHANGE  
WHERE I'M FROM.

MY HOME IS  
BOSU, BUSAN.



TOMIKO WAS BEATEN  
SO BADLY SHE CAN'T  
HEAR OUT OF  
ONE EAR.



I DON'T CARE  
WHAT YOU SAY

BUT MY NAME IS  
NOT TOMIKO.

MY NAME IS  
LEE OK-SUN.

IT'S LEE  
OK-SUN.



IF I HAD RECEIVED TREATMENT THEN,  
EVERYTHING WOULD HAVE BEEN FINE.

IF SHE DOESN'T SEE  
A DOCTOR, SHE MAY  
LOSE HER HEARING  
FOR GOOD.



BUT THEY ONLY TREATED US FOR VENEREAL  
DISEASES. NOTHING ELSE.

HEARING'S GOT  
NOTHING TO DO  
WITH RECEIVING  
SOLDIERS.











STILL, THERE WAS A GIRL WHO MANAGED TO  
ESCAPE. SHE CAME TO THE STATION IN THE  
WINTER OF 1944.



SHE WAS KOREAN.

DEAR ME,  
HOW OLD  
ARE YOU?

I'LL BE TURNING  
THIRTEEN SOON.



SHE DIDN'T SERVICE REGULAR SOLDIERS,  
BUT ONLY OLDER, HIGH-RANKING MEN, LIKE  
COMMANDERS.

AIGO, YOU'RE  
YOUNGER THAN ME.

HOW'D YOU END  
UP AT A PLACE  
LIKE THIS?





A SOLDIER ALWAYS CAME TO TAKE HER TO THE  
COMMANDER. SHE HAD A PLAIN, BUT PLEASANT  
FACE. SHE REMINDED ME OF MY SISTER OKJA.



SIS, I'M GONNA  
RUN AWAY.

WE CAN'T EVEN  
MANAGE IT.  
HOW WILL YOU?



I CAN'T REMEMBER HER NAME NOW. THEN ONE DAY, SHE REALLY RAN AWAY.





THE WHOLE BASE WAS TURNED  
UPSIDE DOWN.

BEEEEEP  
BEEEEEP



THE COMFORT STATION WAS IN CHAOS.

SHE COULDN'T  
HAVE GONE FAR!

FIND HER!

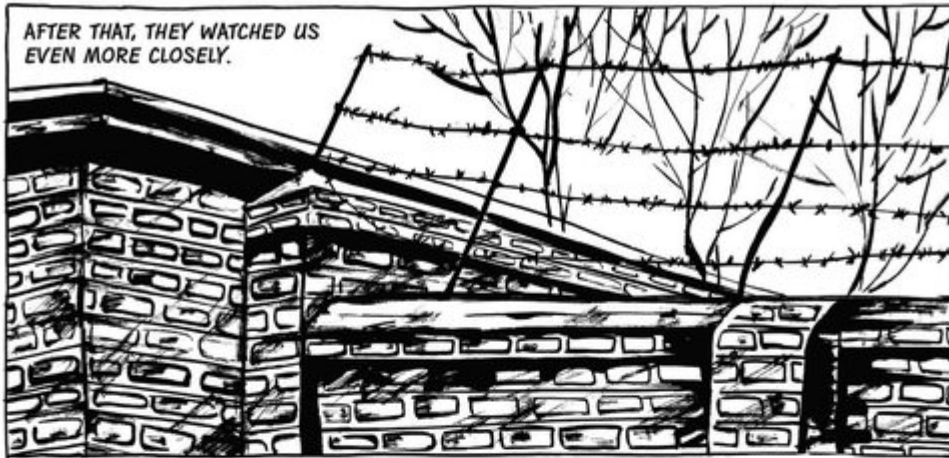


THEY NEVER FOUND HER.



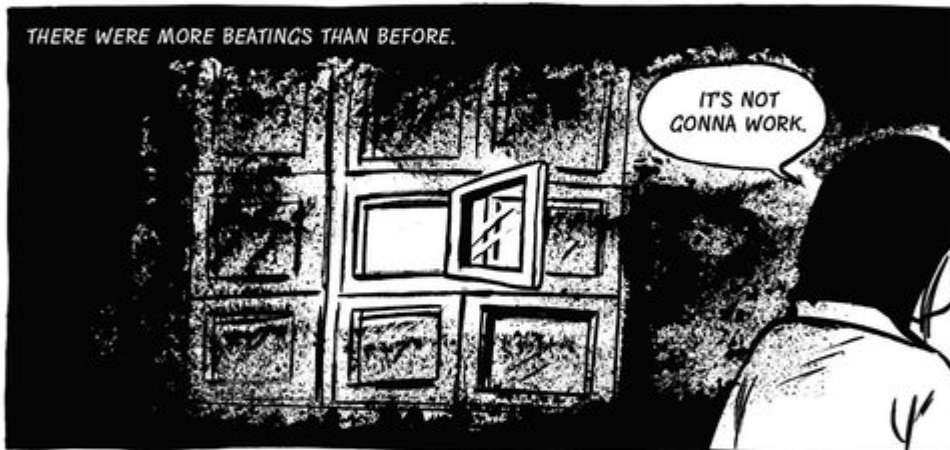


AFTER THAT, THEY WATCHED US  
EVEN MORE CLOSELY.



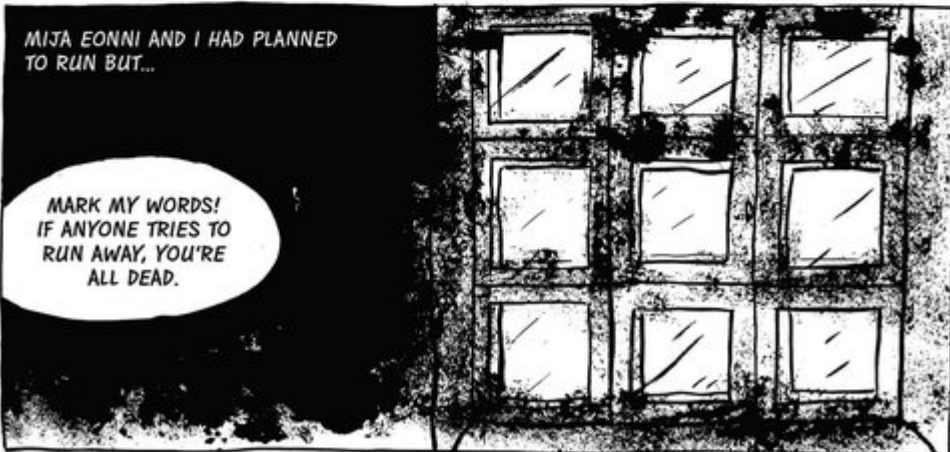
THERE WERE MORE BEATINGS THAN BEFORE.

IT'S NOT  
GONNA WORK.



MIJA EONNI AND I HAD PLANNED  
TO RUN BUT...

MARK MY WORDS!  
IF ANYONE TRIES TO  
RUN AWAY, YOU'RE  
ALL DEAD.



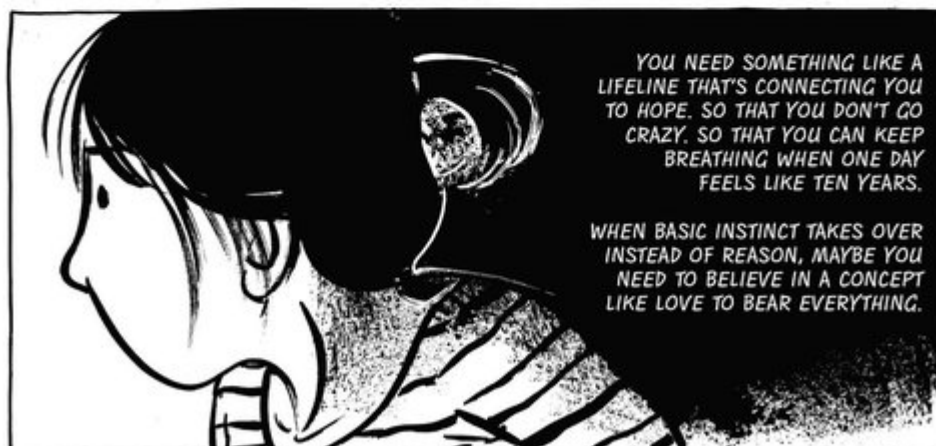




WE WERE ALL SO TERRIFIED THAT NO ONE DARED TRY.







\*MOON OKJU WAS BORN IN DAEGU IN 1924. SHE WAS TAKEN TO HEILONGJIANG IN 1940 AND PRESENT-DAY MYANMAR IN 1942 TO SERVE AS A "COMFORT WOMAN."



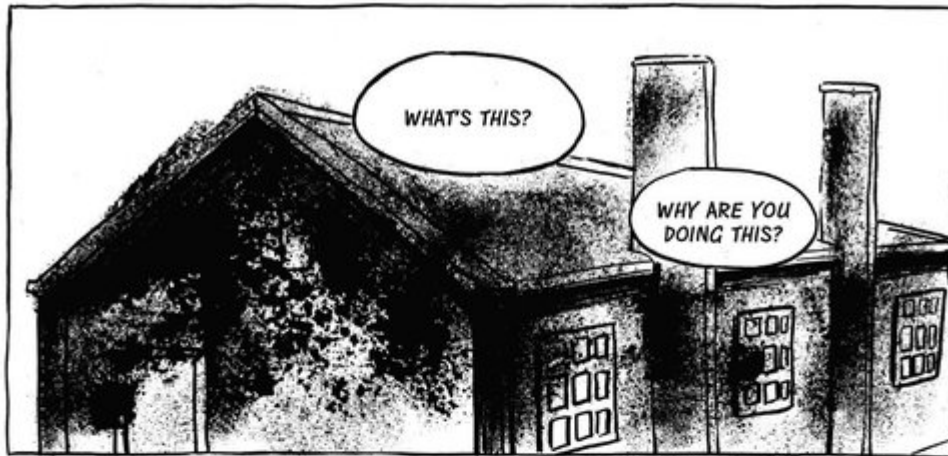


















HIS DISCHARGE DATE WAS APPROACHING

HEY!

BUT HE STAYED AWAY.

P!\*

P! WHAT ARE  
YOU DOING? HURRY  
UP AND TAKE OFF MY  
SHOES.

TOMIKO, SOMEONE'S  
HERE FOR YOU.

GO SEE WHAT  
HE WANTS.

\*"COMFORT WOMEN" WERE SOMETIMES ADDRESSED AS P.







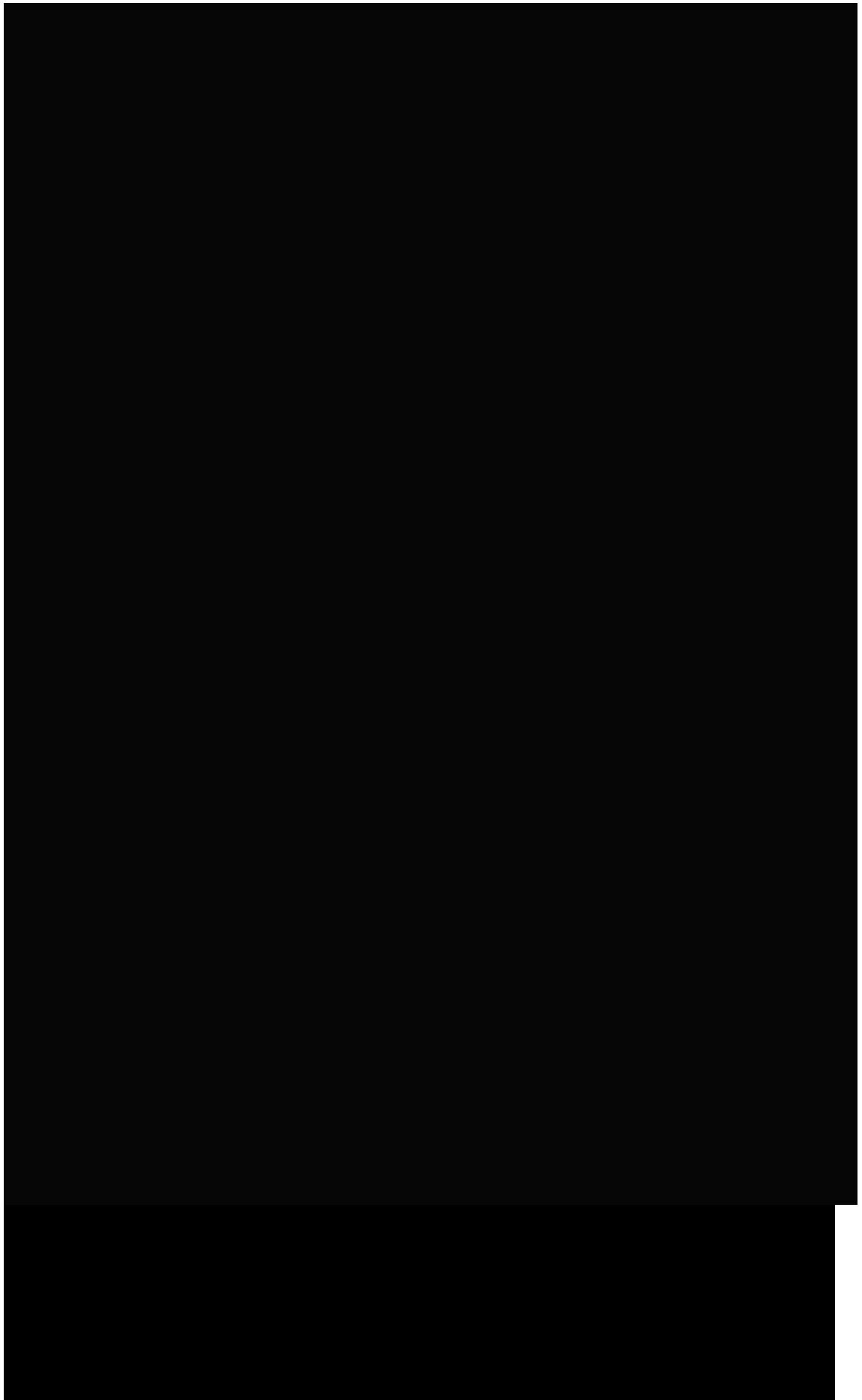


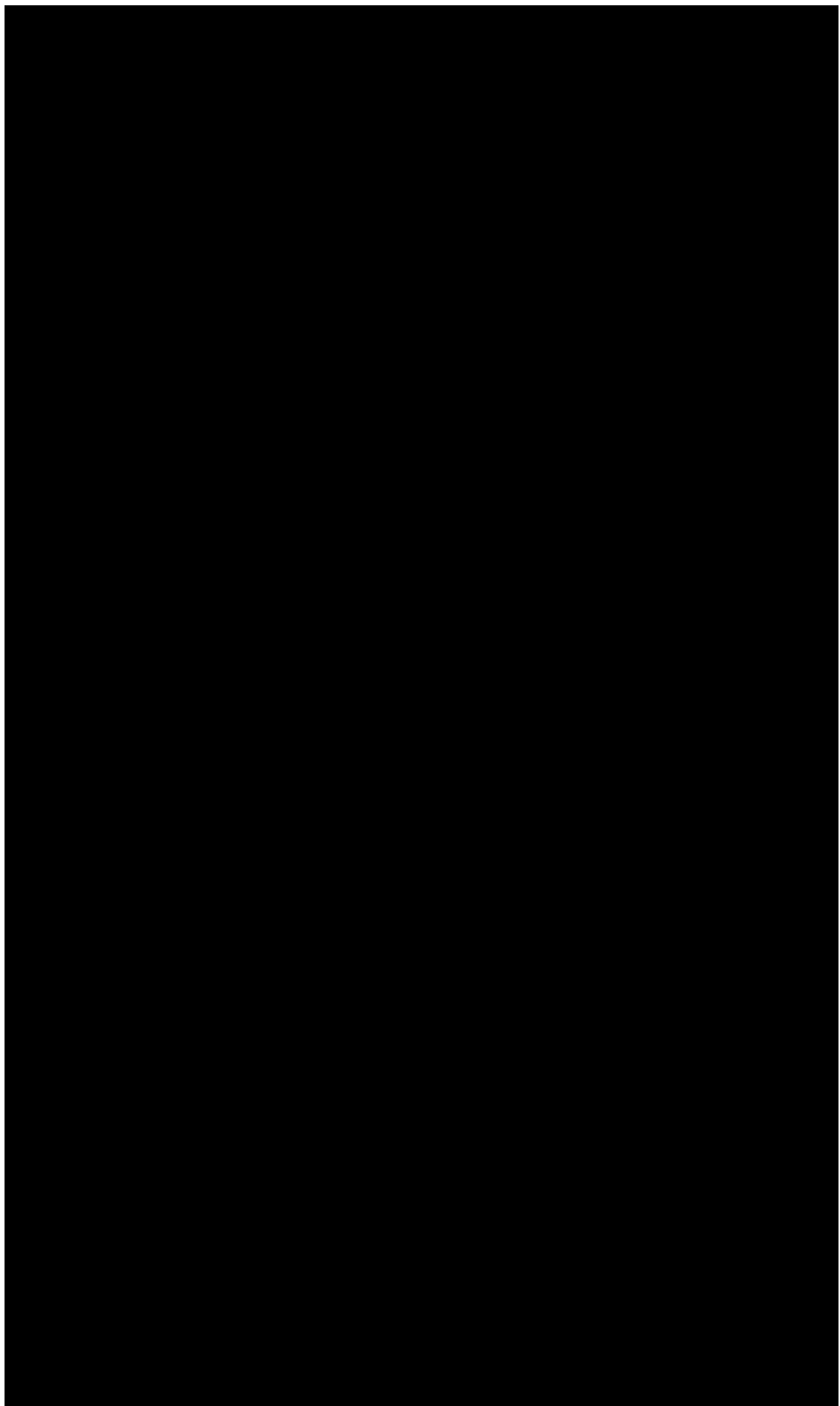










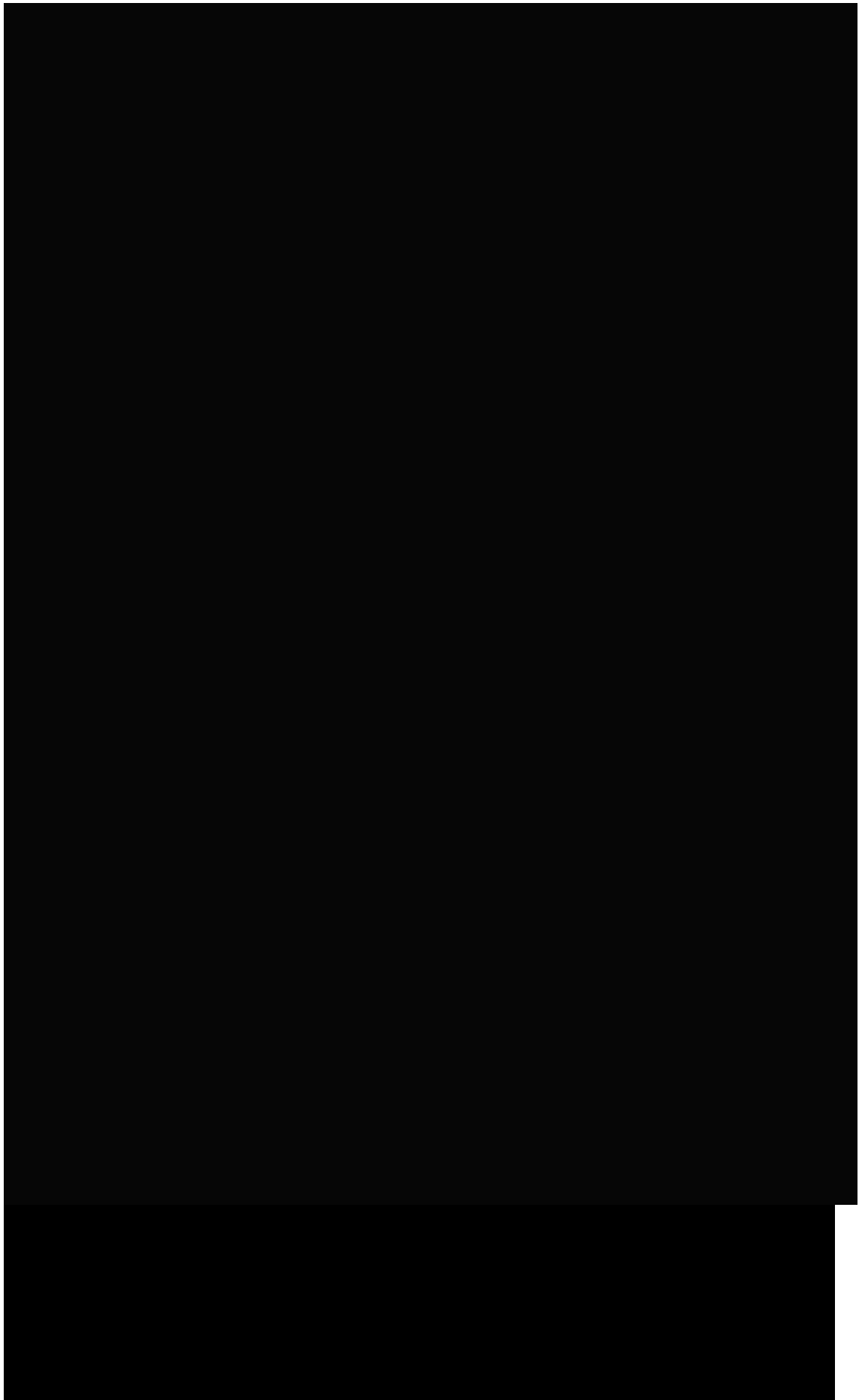


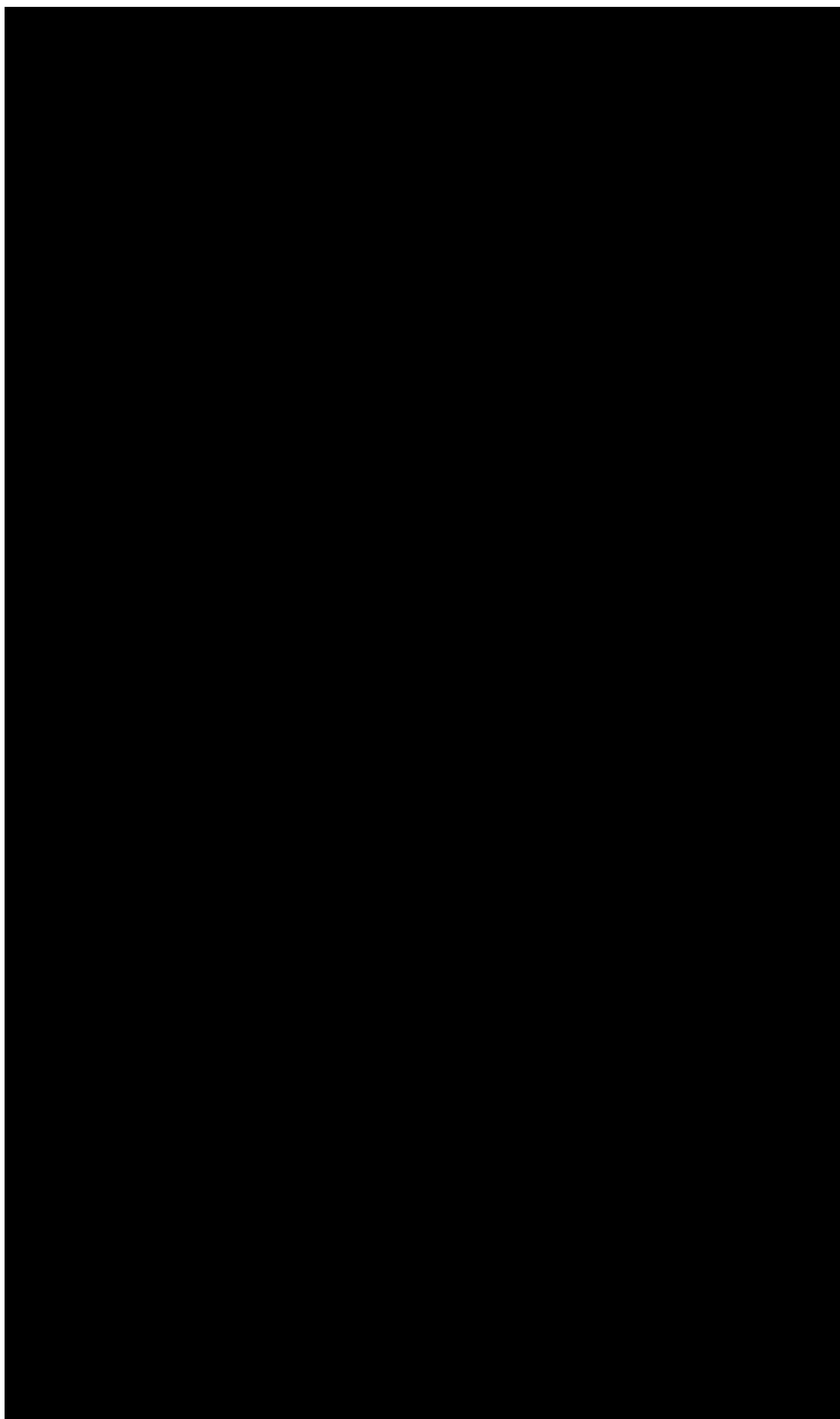
LIBERATION AND  
THE ABANDONED GIRLS













HOW'D YOU FIND OUT  
THE WAR WAS OVER?



OUR STATION NEAR THE WEST MARKET WAS TOO CRAMPED, SO WE  
MOVED TO A BIGGER STATION NEAR THE YANJI HOSPITAL.



THE WAR ENDED WHILE WE WERE THERE, BUT WE HAD NO IDEA WE'D BEEN LIBERATED.  
HOW COULD WE KNOW, SINCE NO ONE TOLD US?



ON THE MORNING OF AUGUST 6, 1945,  
AMERICA DROPPED THE  
ATOMIC BOMB  
"LITTLE BOY"  
ON HIROSHIMA.







AT THE TIME, HIROSHIMA HAD A POPULATION OF OVER 350,000. BECAUSE OF THE WIND, "LITTLE BOY" EXPLODED 600 METERS ABOVE DR. SHIMA'S CLINIC, ABOUT 240 METERS AWAY FROM THE TARGET OF THE T-SHAPED AIOI BRIDGE.





THE TEMPERATURE AT THE  
HYPOCENTER WAS 3000-4000  
DEGREES CELSIUS. HUMANS  
WERE INSTANTLY VAPORIZED,  
LEAVING BEHIND ONLY THEIR  
SHADOWS. THERE WAS A  
RAGING FIRESTORM, THEN  
A BLACK RAIN OF DEATH.  
HIROSHIMA BECAME  
A LIVING HELL.



WHEN JAPAN DIDN'T SURRENDER  
IMMEDIATELY, AMERICA DROPPED  
ANOTHER ATOMIC BOMB ON NAGASAKI  
ON AUGUST 9: THE "FAT MAN."





A GIRL STANDS IN THE RUBBLE, CRYING  
DESPERATELY FOR HER MOTHER, WHO'S BEEN  
REDUCED TO A CHARRED CORPSE BEHIND HER.






A YOUNG BOY WAITS HIS TURN AT A CREMATION  
GROUND WITH HIS DEAD BABY BROTHER ON HIS  
BACK. HE STANDS AT ATTENTION, BITING HIS  
LOWER LIP SO HARD HE DRAWS BLOOD.












IN THE THREE-MONTH PERIOD FOLLOWING THE ATOMIC  
EXPLOSIONS, ABOUT 160,000 PEOPLE ARE ESTIMATED TO  
HAVE DIED IN HIROSHIMA AND ABOUT 80,000 IN NAGASAKI.  
THIS BRUTAL LOSS OF INNOCENTS CAUSED JAPAN  
TO SURRENDER ON AUGUST 15, 1945.



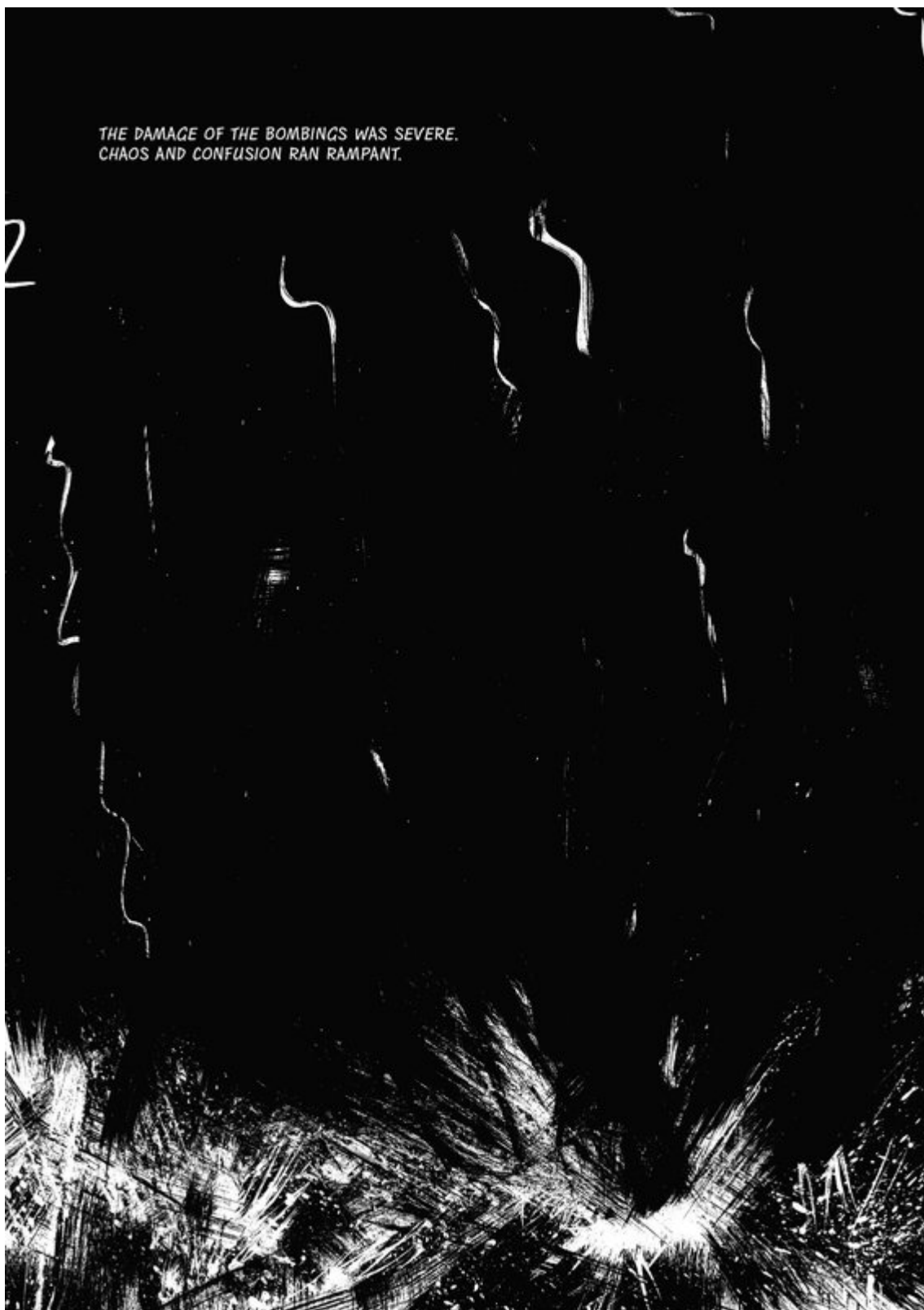


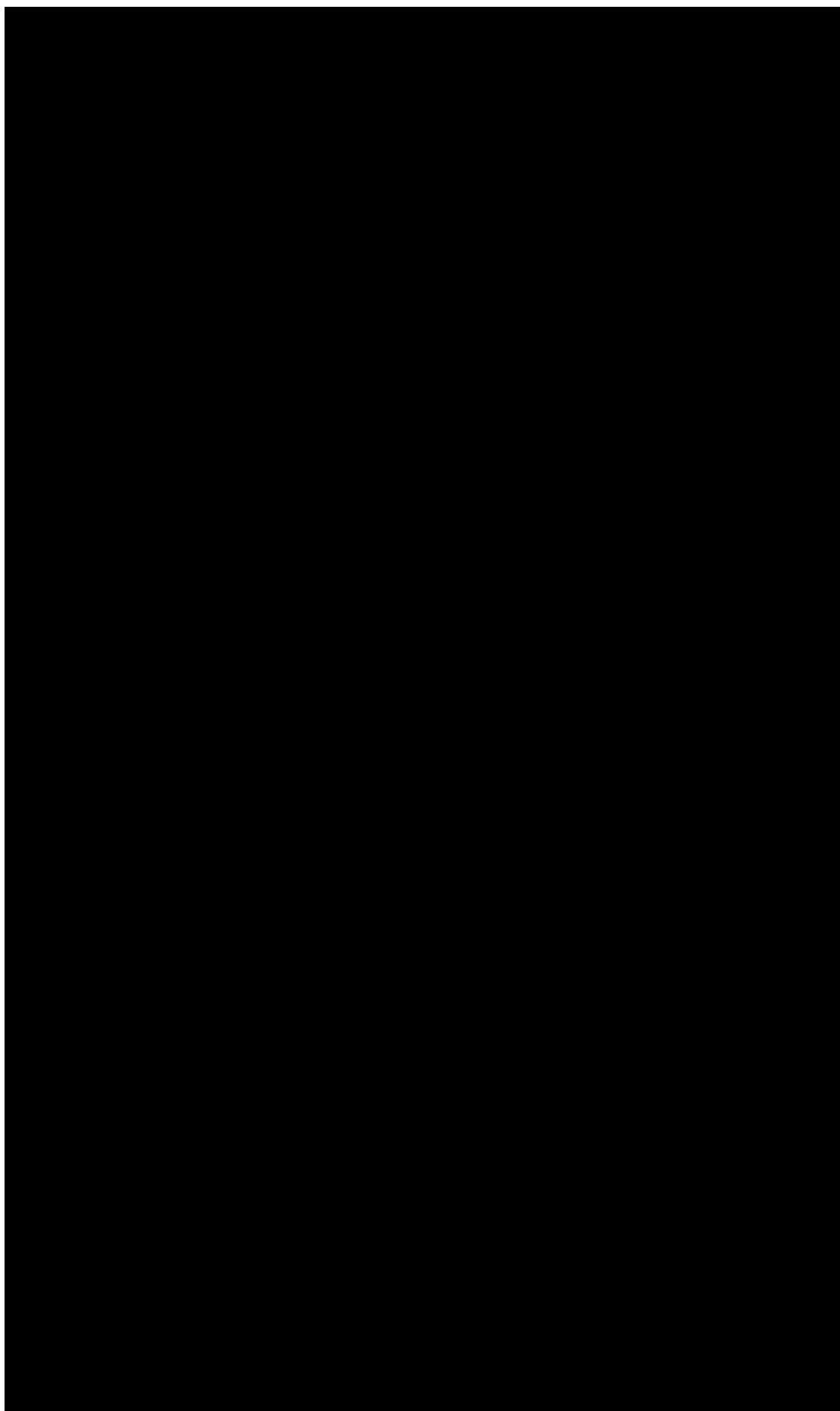
MANY KOREANS WHO HAD BEEN SENT TO  
HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI AGAINST THEIR WILL  
BECAME VICTIMS OF THE BOMBINGS. THEY  
SUFFERED, WITHOUT EVEN A RECORD OF THEIR  
NAMES. BECAUSE THEY WERE KOREAN, THEY  
WERE UNABLE TO RECEIVE TREATMENT.

SHIM JINTAE, THE DIRECTOR OF THE HAPCHEON  
CHAPTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF KOREAN  
ATOMIC BOMB VICTIMS, CLAIMS THAT AT LEAST  
100,000 OF THE 740,000 VICTIMS WERE  
KOREANS, WITH 50,000 LOSING  
THEIR LIVES IN THE BLASTS.



THE DAMAGE OF THE BOMBINGS WAS SEVERE.  
CHAOS AND CONFUSION RAN RAMPANT.






ON AUGUST 15, 1945, WHILE  
KOREANS WERE CELEBRATING  
THE LIBERATION...









THE JAPANESE SOLDIERS  
FLED AND THE COMFORT WOMEN  
WERE ABANDONED.

DID THE SOLDIERS JUST ABANDON  
THEIR BASES? DID THEY EVACUATE  
WITH THE WOMEN?

BOTH.





WHAT HAPPENED TO  
YOUR STATION?

WELL, ALL THE SOLDIERS  
TOOK OFF.



THE STATION MANAGERS WENT ON  
THE RUN, DRAGGING US ALONG.



SOMETHING'S  
REALLY FISHY  
HERE.



LET'S  
RUN AWAY.

BUT THEY'LL PROBABLY  
CATCH US!











EVEN TODAY IF YOU WALK ABOUT TEN KILOMETERS INTO THE MOUNTAIN BEHIND YANJI PARK, YOU'LL COME ACROSS AN OLD HUT. THEY LEFT US THERE AND RAN AWAY.



WE STAYED THERE FOR A FEW DAYS, HAVING NO IDEA THE WAR WAS OVER. THEN A PASSING FARMER TOLD US THE NEWS.

OH, I'M SO HUNGRY...



WHAT ARE YOU GIRLS DOING HERE?



DON'T YOU KNOW YOU'VE BEEN LIBERATED?



LIBERATED? WHAT'S THAT?













WHEN WE FINALLY GOT TO DOWNTOWN YANJI,  
EVERYTHING WAS ON FIRE.

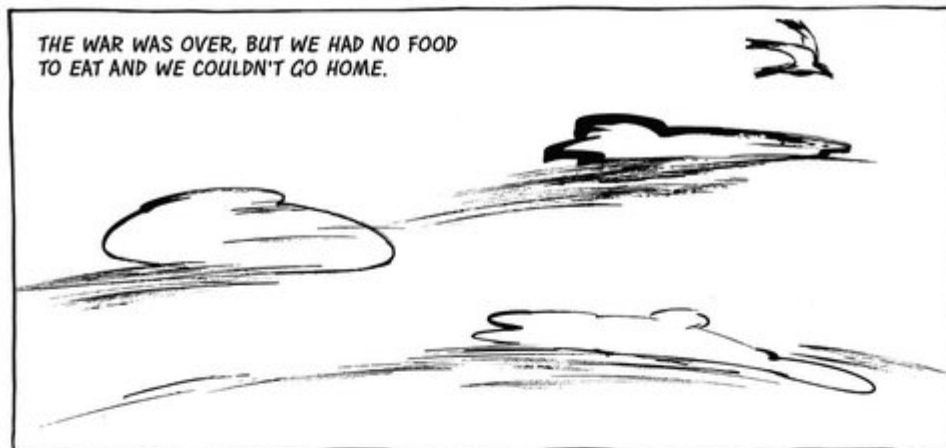






























SO THE SIX OF US SPLIT UP IN ORDER TO  
SURVIVE. OCCASIONALLY SOMEONE WOULD  
GIVE ME A BITE TO EAT AND I WOULD  
MANAGE TO KEEP WALKING.





SOME DAYS,  
I WOULD BEG.



IF I HAD NO STRENGTH LEFT, I JUST  
SANK DOWN IN ANY OLD SPOT AND  
SLEPT. THERE WERE TIMES I WOKE  
TO FIND MYSELF IN THE MIDDLE OF  
A BUSY STREET. ANY SPOT UNDER  
THE SKY BECAME MY HOME.

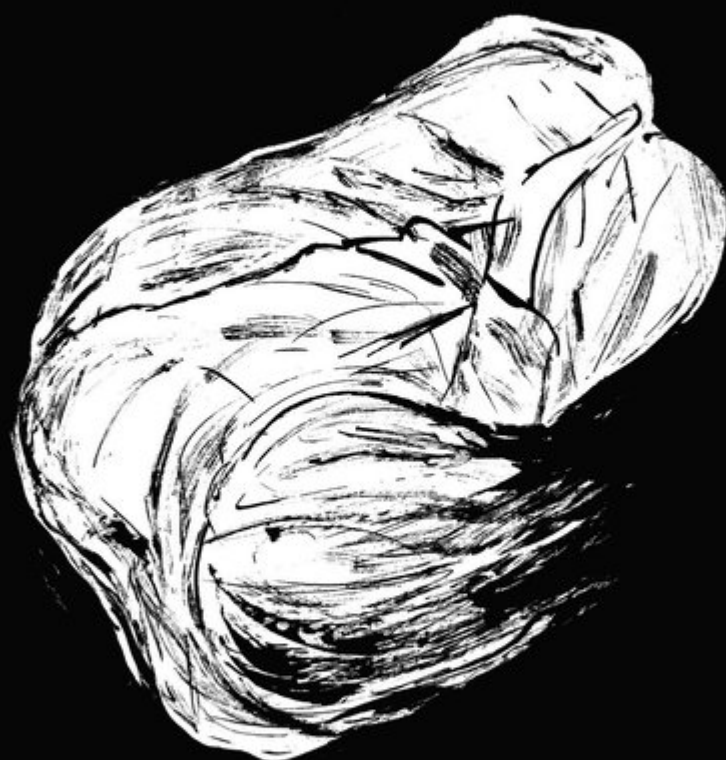


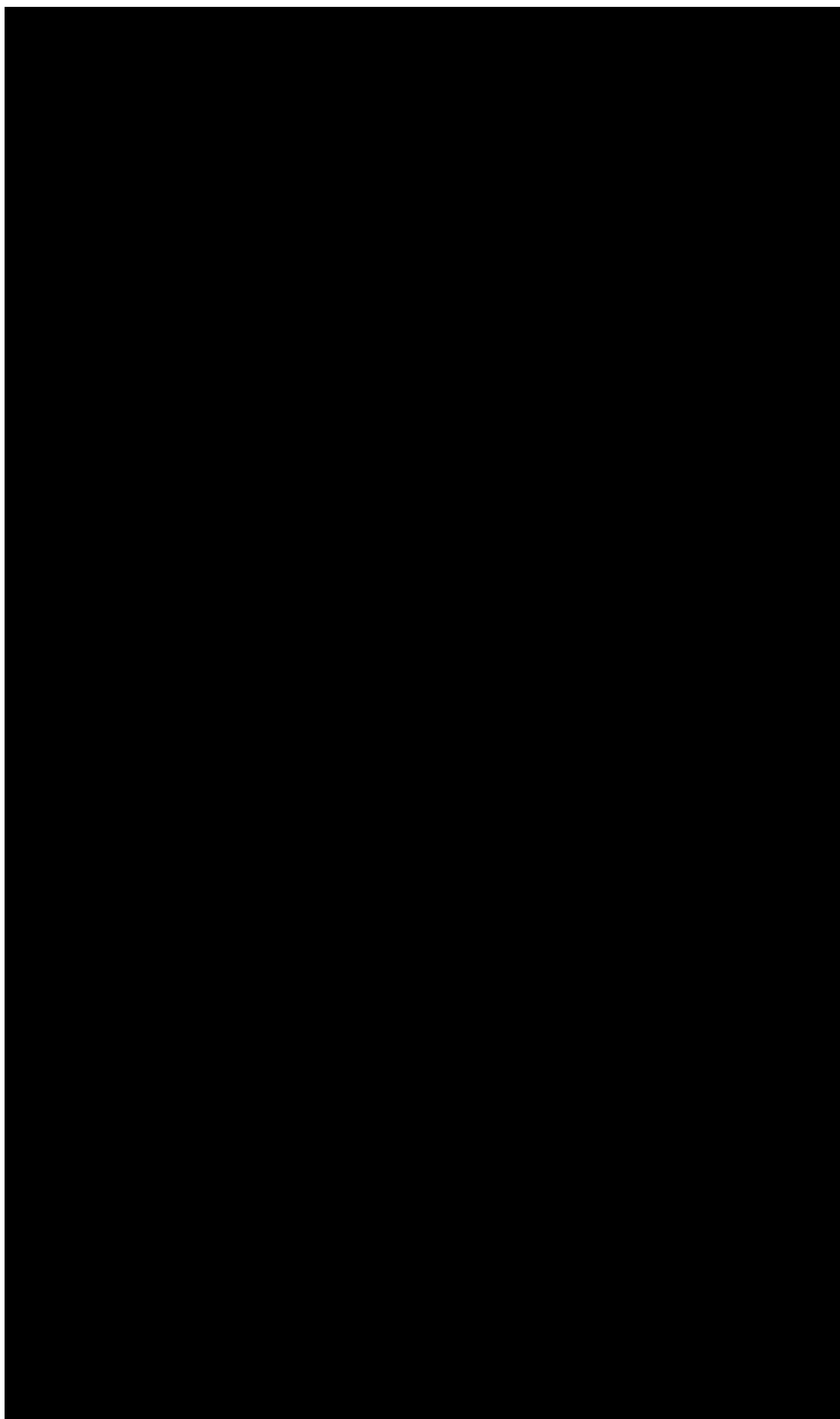








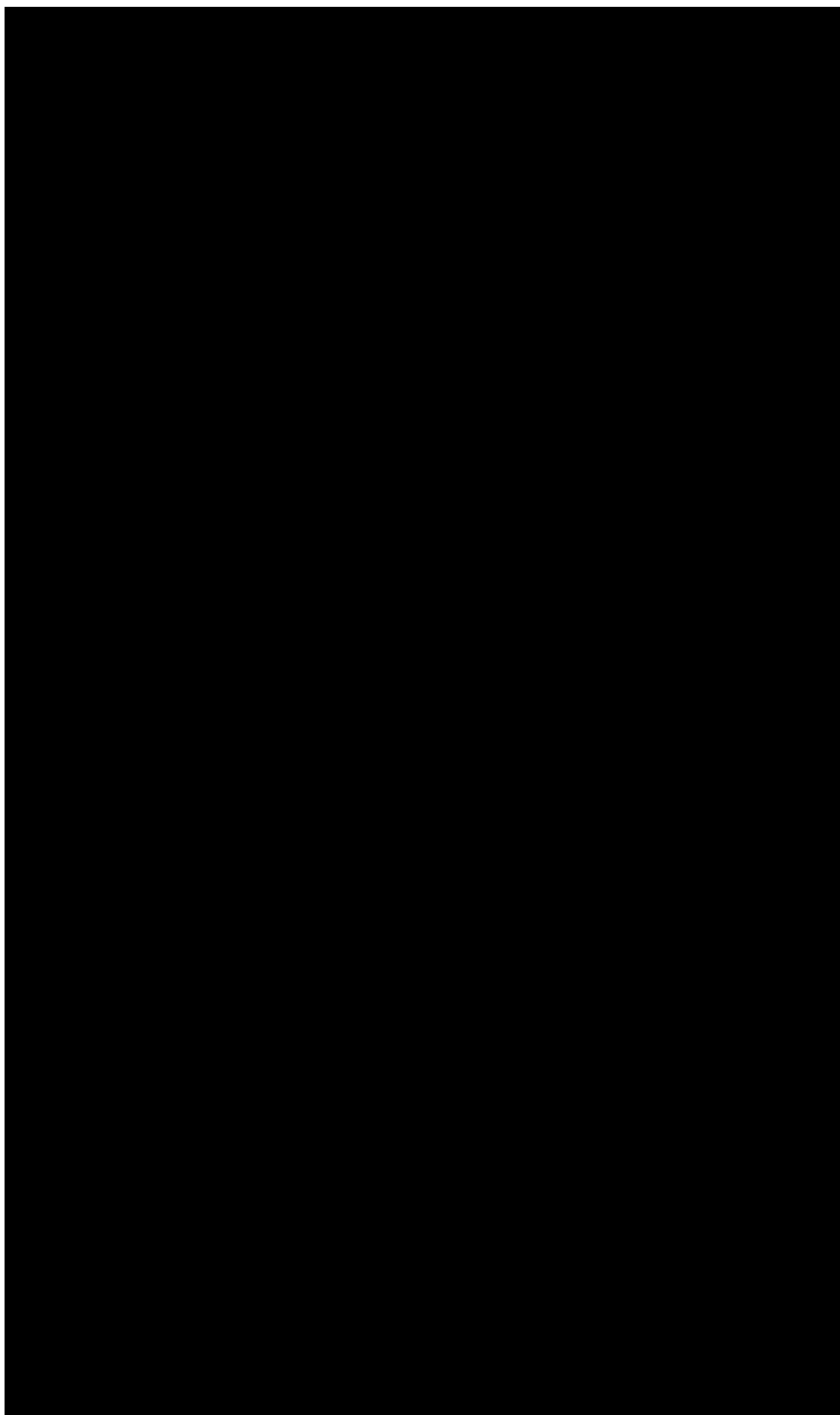


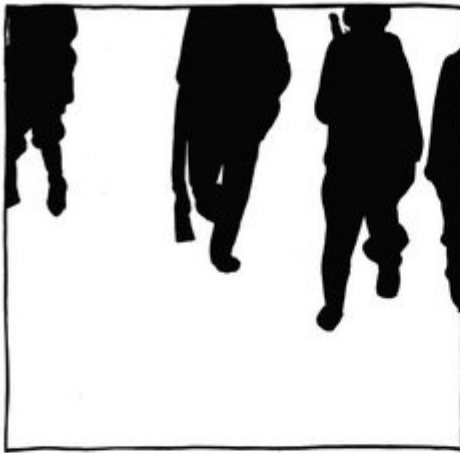






OUR SUFFERING WASN'T OVER YET. THE SOVIET  
SOLDIERS CAME. THOSE BASTARDS DID BRUTAL THINGS.  
THEY SNATCHED ANY GIRLS THEY SAW, RAPED THEM,  
AND DID WHATEVER THEY WANTED. I SAW SO MANY  
GIRLS RAPED THEN SHOT OR SET ON FIRE  
BY THOSE MONSTERS.























THEN ONE DAY AS I WAS WANDERING THE STREETS, I SUDDENLY THOUGHT  
OF HIM. SHIM YEONGSEOP, THE CAPTAIN FROM THE YANJI AIRFIELD.  
HE'D TOLD ME HIS HOME WAS IN LONGJING.





I DECIDED TO GO LOOK  
FOR HIM.

















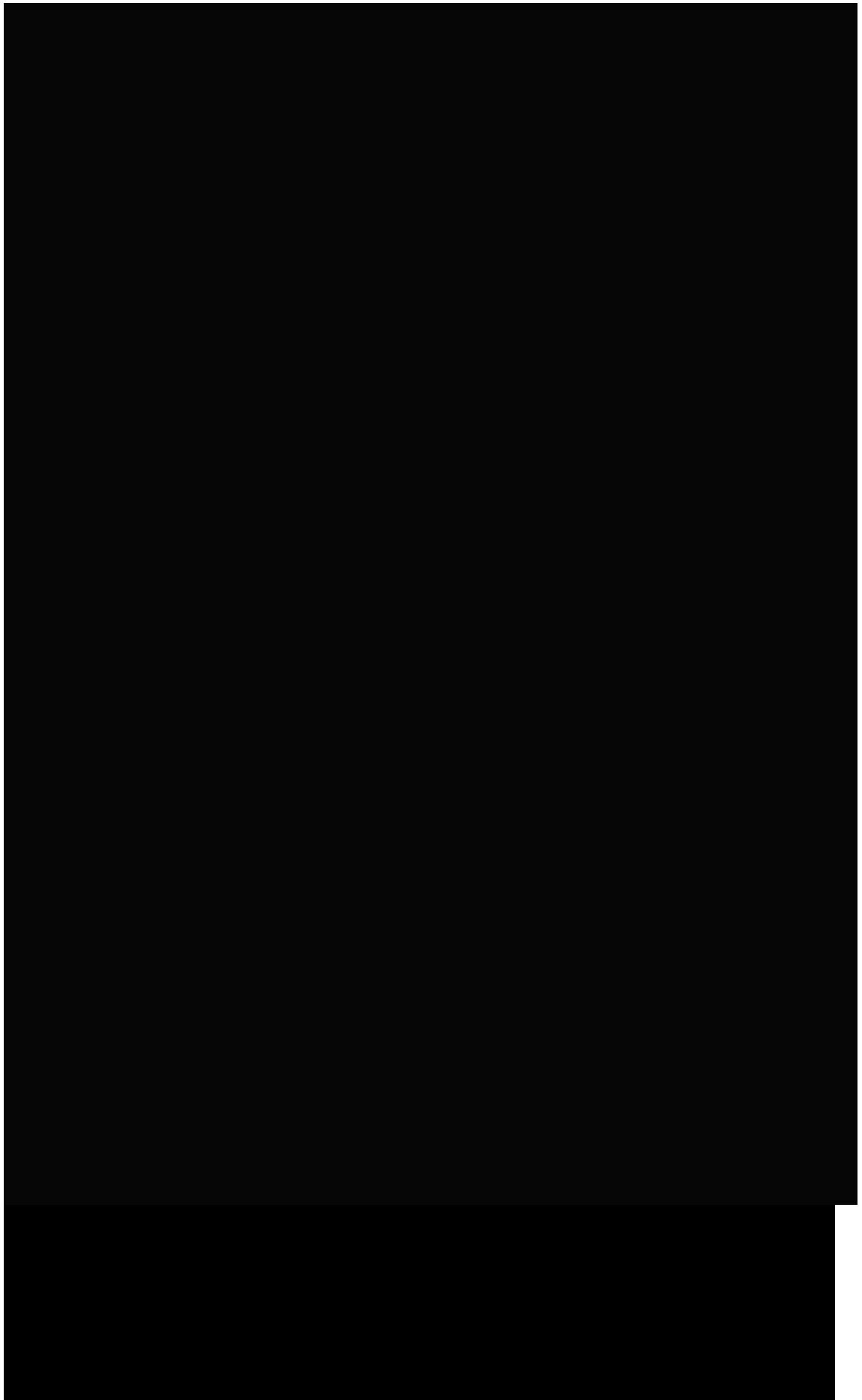


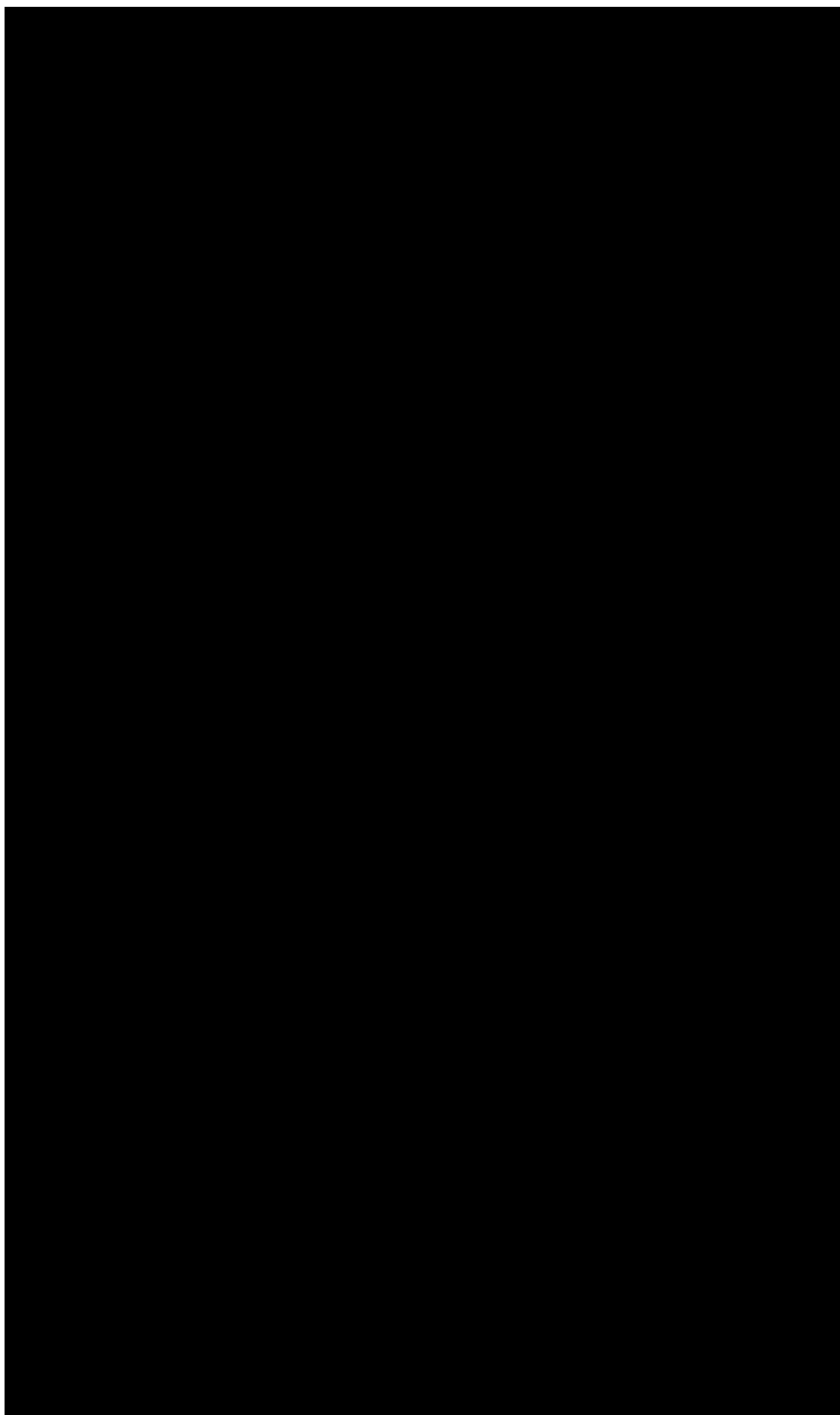










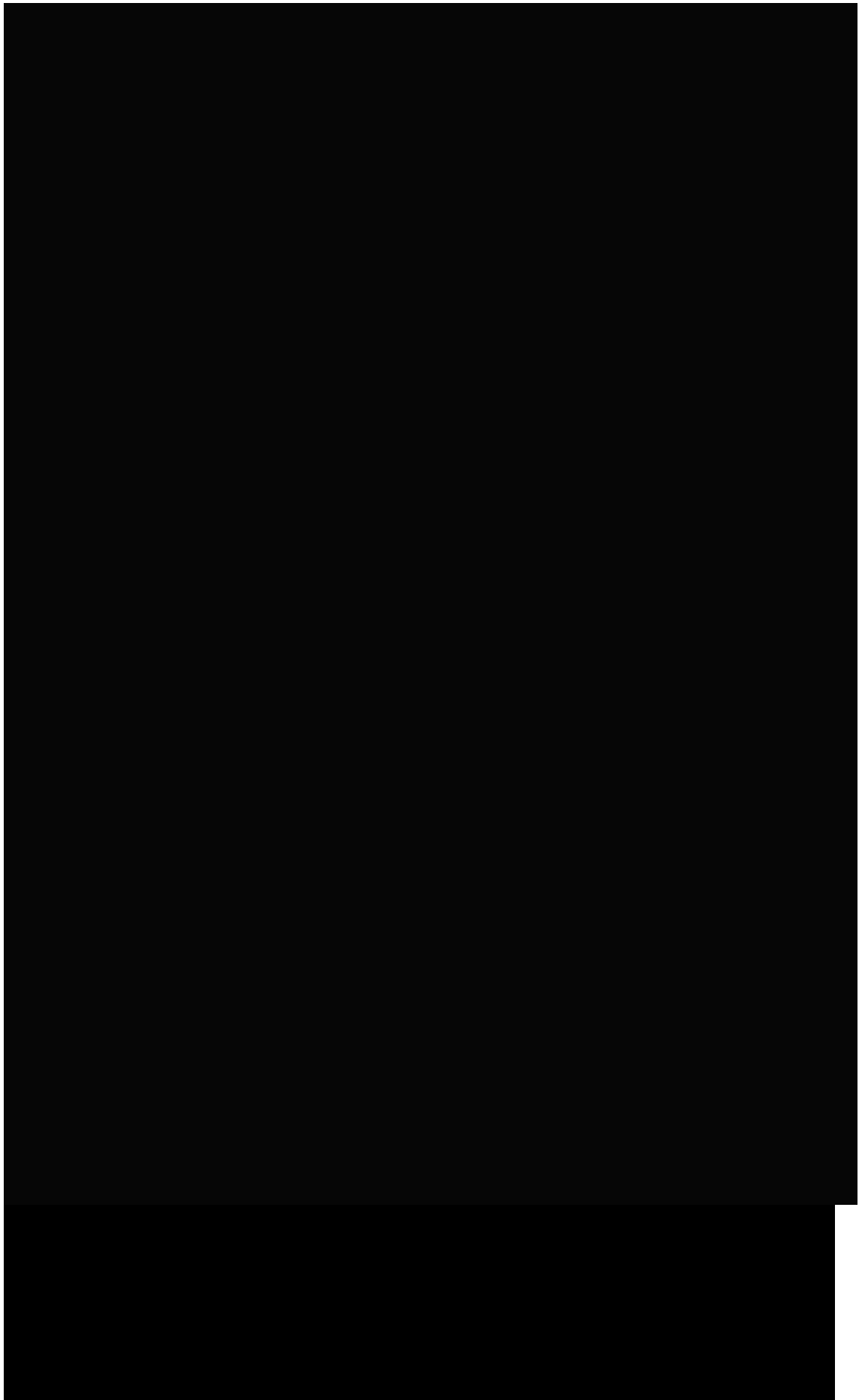


## FIRST MARRIAGE

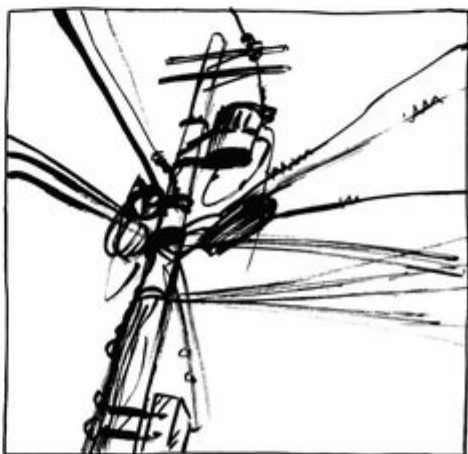








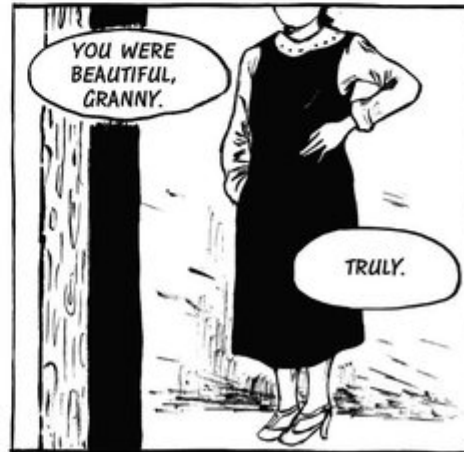
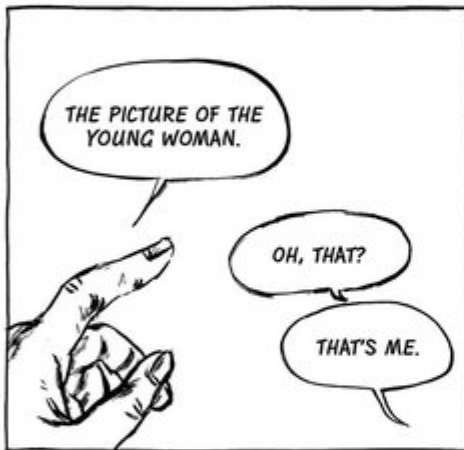










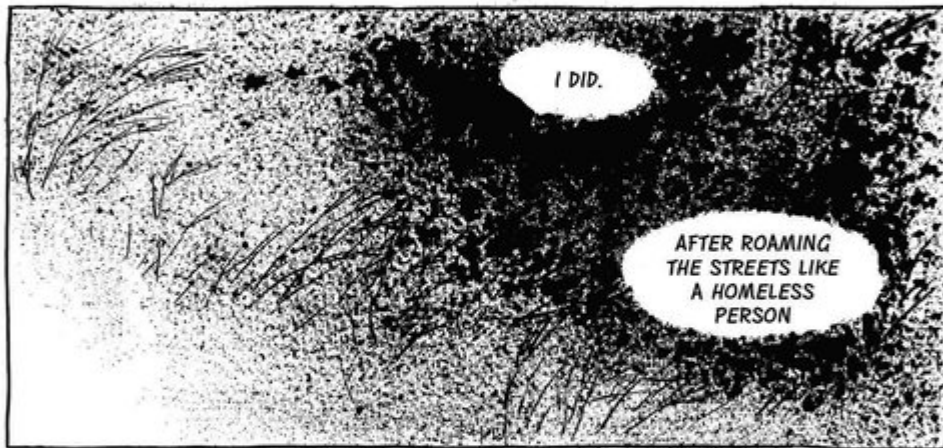
























IT WAS 1945, SO I WAS EIGHTEEN AND HE WAS TWENTY.

FATHER, I'M GOING TO MARRY THIS WOMAN.

WHAT?!?!







AND SO WE GOT  
PERMISSION TO MARRY.



EVEN BEFORE OUR MARRIAGE CEREMONY,  
OPPA INSISTED ON JOINING THE  
KOREAN VOLUNTEER ARMY.\*

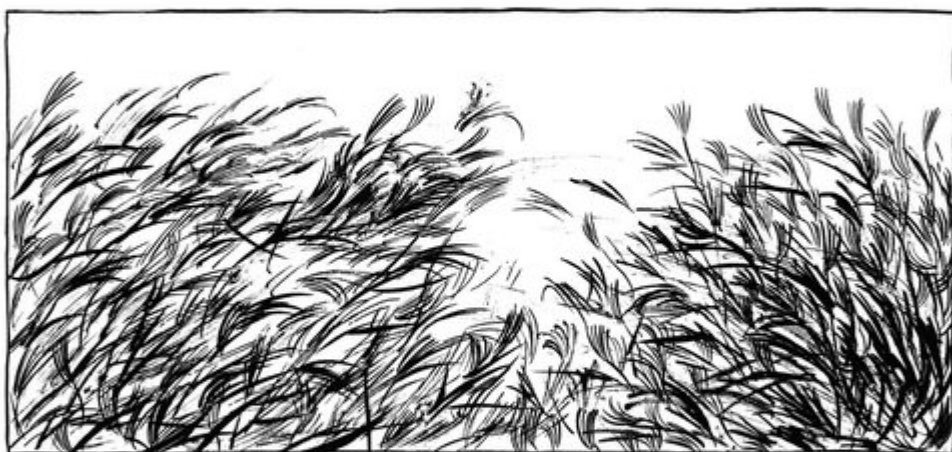


NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE TRIED TO TALK HIM OUT  
OF IT, IT WAS NO USE.

FOUR DAYS BEFORE HE LEFT TO JOIN THE  
KVA, WE GOT MARRIED.

\*THE KOREAN VOLUNTEER ARMY (KVA) FOUGHT AGAINST JAPANESE TROOPS ALONGSIDE CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES, WHO PROVIDED THE ARMY WITH WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION. AFTER THE DEFEAT OF THE JAPANESE, THE KVA ACCOMPANIED CHINESE COMMUNIST FORCES INTO MANCHURIA, BEFORE CROSSING INTO KOREAN TERRITORY.







FOUR DAYS AFTER THE WEDDING CEREMONY



WE SAID GOODBYE ONCE MORE.















I HEARD LATER THAT THE KVA HAD SENT  
HIM TO NORTH KOREA.













I WAITED TEN YEARS.

THEN ONE DAY HIS UNCLE  
WENT OUT TO DOWNTOWN  
YANJI



AND HAPPENED TO  
RUN INTO HIM.





























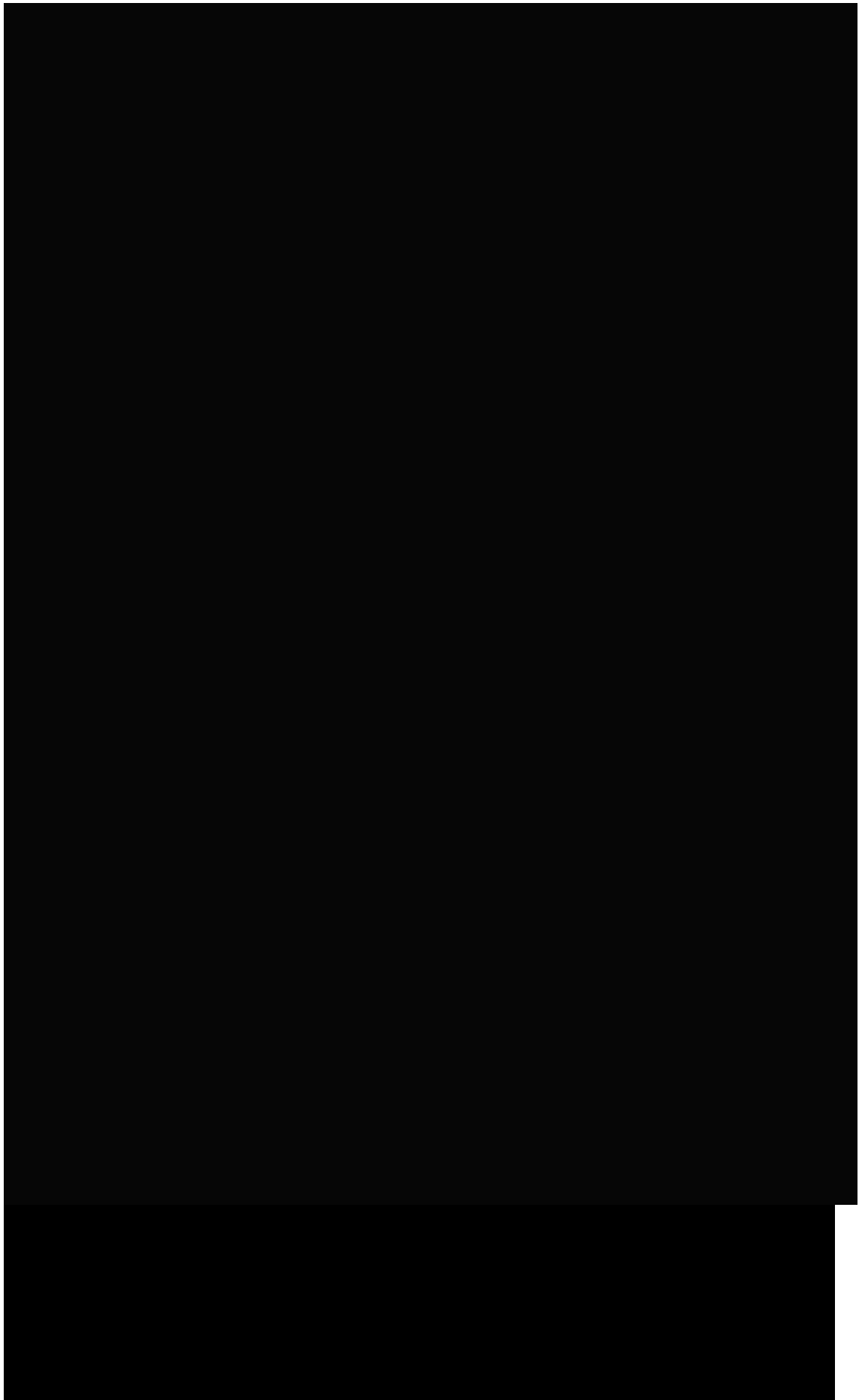


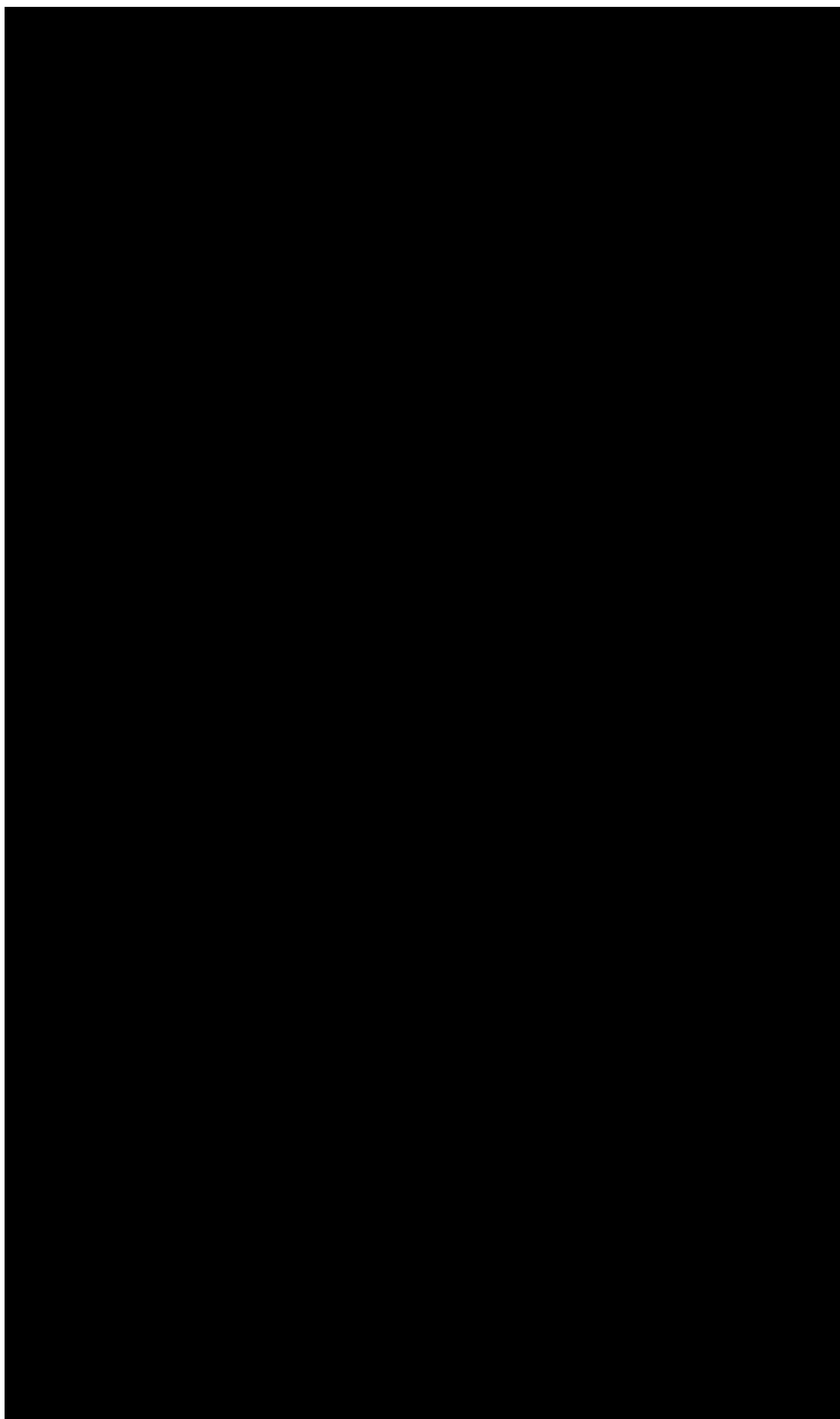
MY SON











ONE DAY, YEONGSEOP OPPA'S AUNT, WHO LIVED DEEP IN THE WOODS



ASKED ME TO COME TO HER HOUSE.



I GOTTA MAKE KIMCHI.  
I COULD USE A HAND.



STRIP THE  
ROTTEN LEAVES.

ALL  
RIGHT.







IT WAS REALLY STRANGE.



SHE'D ASKED ME FOR HELP BEFORE,  
BUT THIS FELT DIFFERENT.



WHY WAS SHE ACTING  
SO WEIRD? WHEN I  
THOUGHT LONG AND  
HARD, I REALIZED  
SHE WAS TRYING TO  
MARRY ME OFF.



SINCE I WAS WORKING  
RIGHT IN FRONT OF  
THE HOUSE



THE MEN PASSING BY  
WOULD SEE ME.



A FEW DAYS LATER, SHE  
EVENTUALLY SAID...



















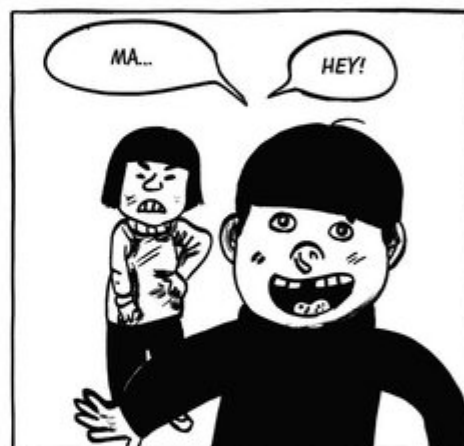










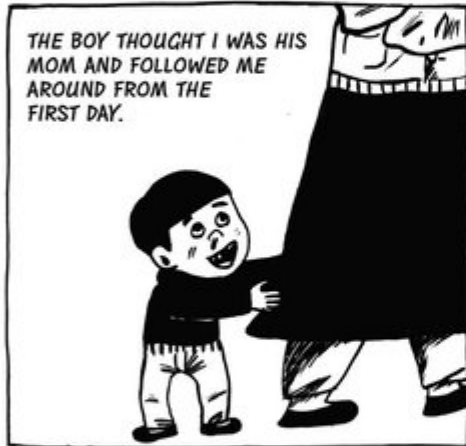




THE BOY HAD A DISABILITY. WE HAD TO SHOUT BECAUSE HE COULDN'T HEAR WELL.  
HE DIDN'T START TALKING UNTIL HE WAS EIGHT.

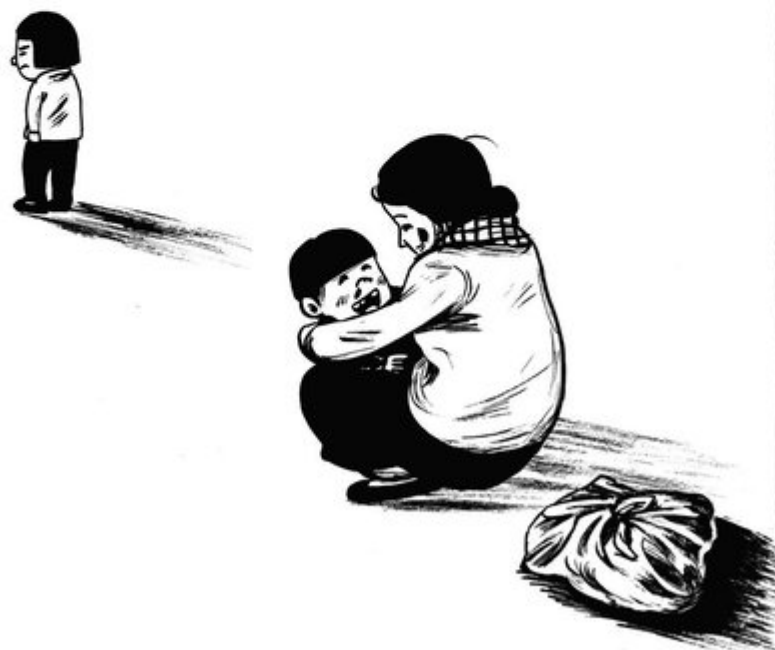


THE BOY THOUGHT I WAS HIS  
MOM AND FOLLOWED ME  
AROUND FROM THE  
FIRST DAY.





HE WASN'T MY FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT  
BECAUSE OF HIM, I COULDN'T LEAVE.







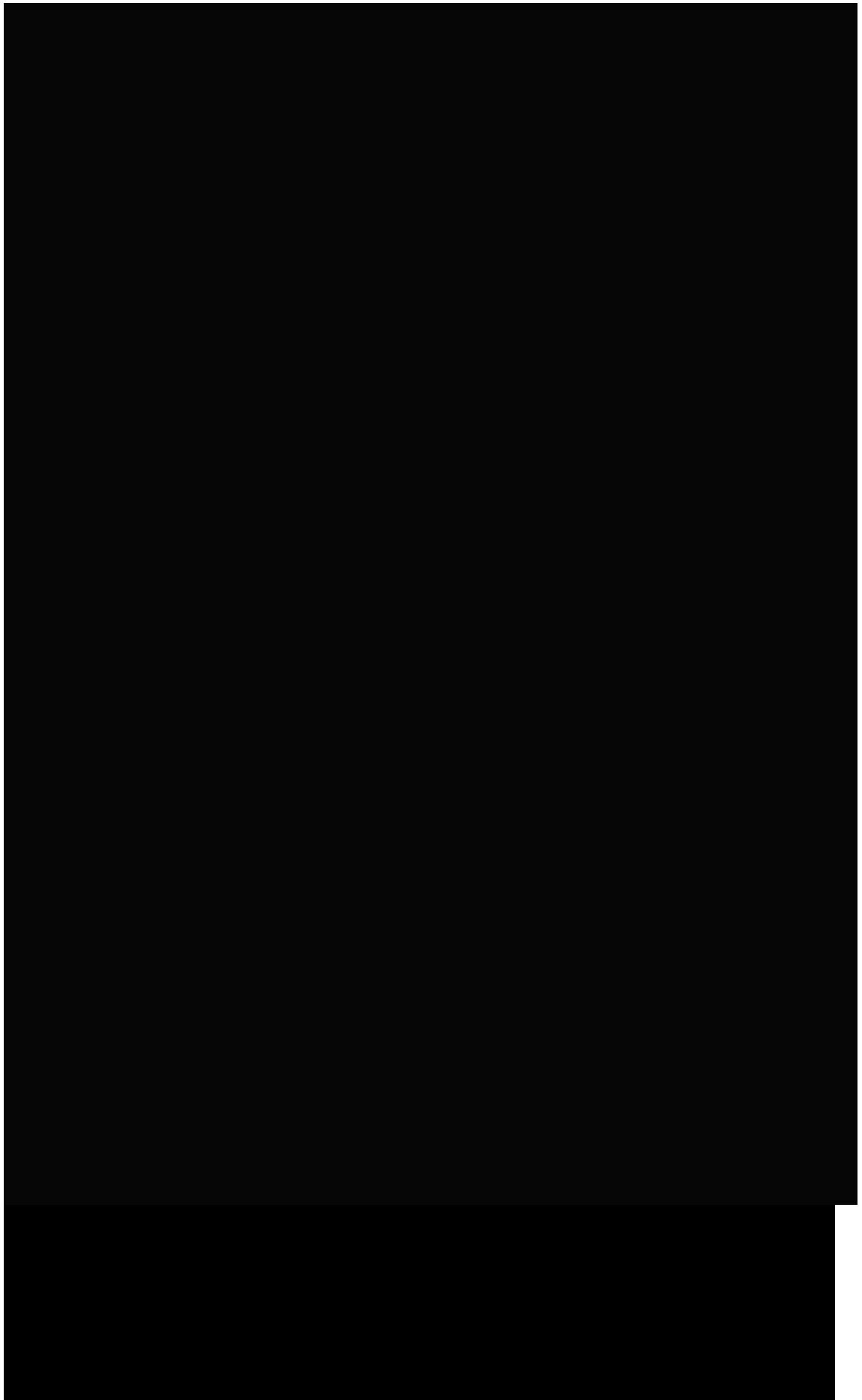
I DIDN'T THINK I COULD STAY WITH THAT MAN, BUT I ENDED UP  
SPENDING FIFTY YEARS WITH HIM.

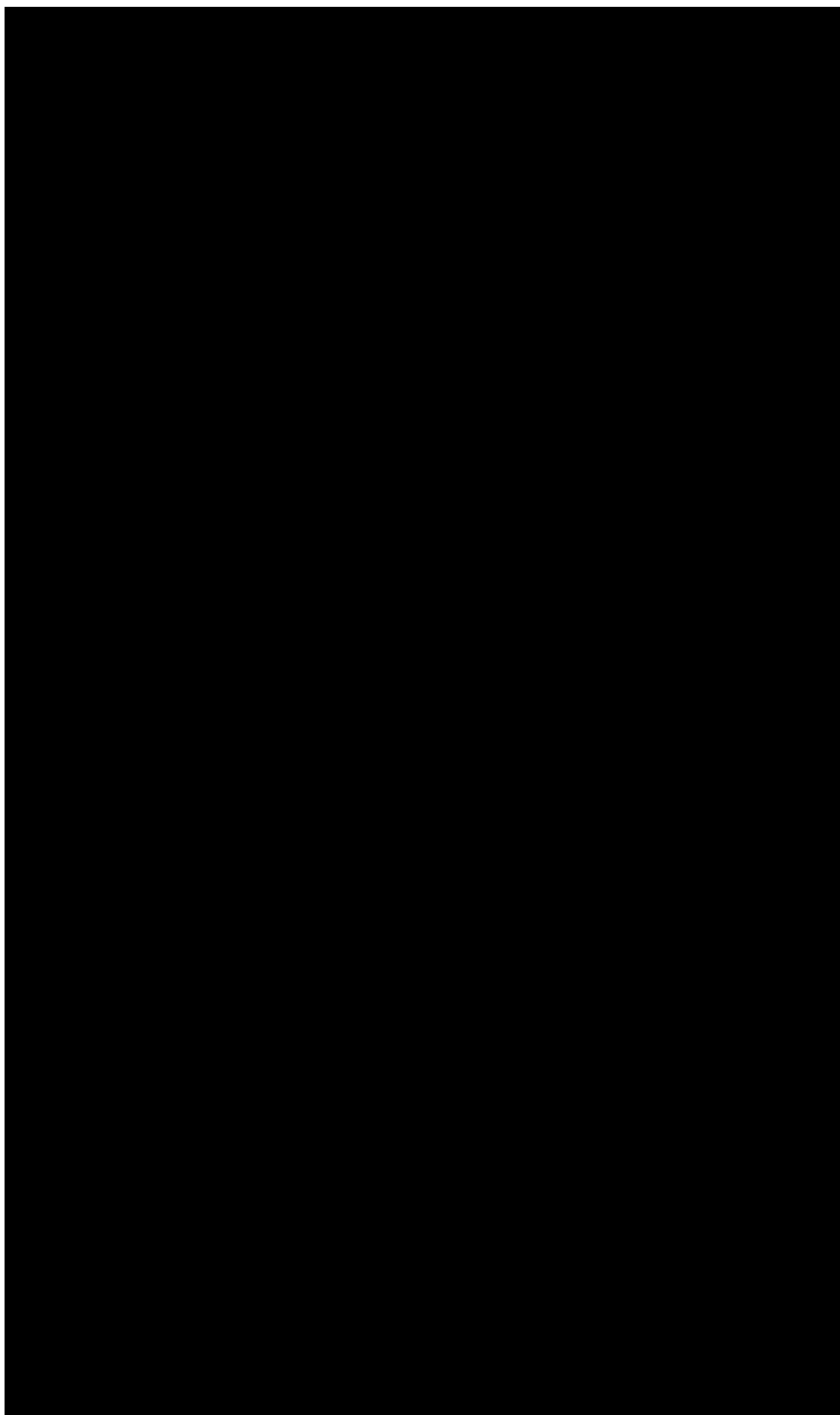










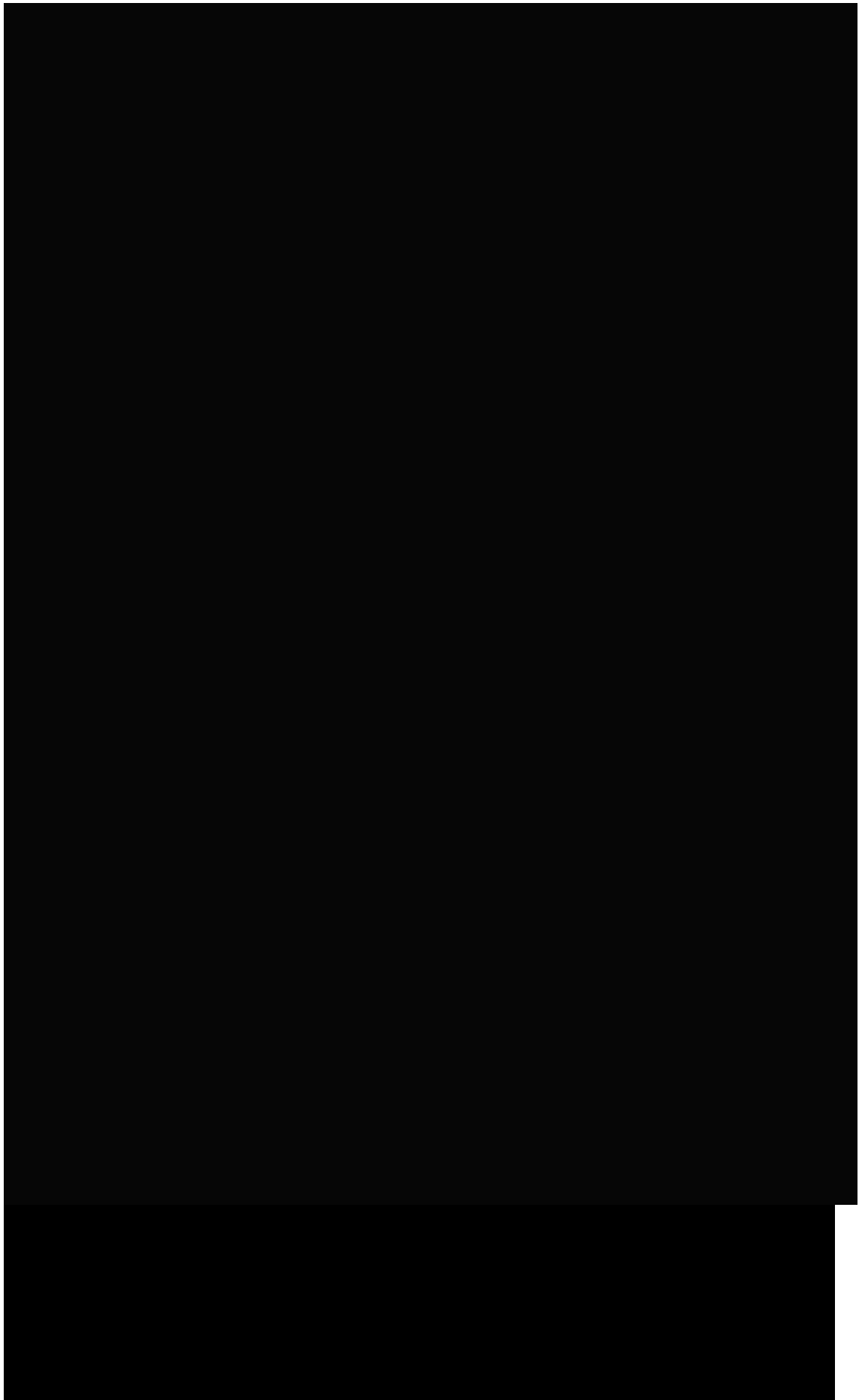


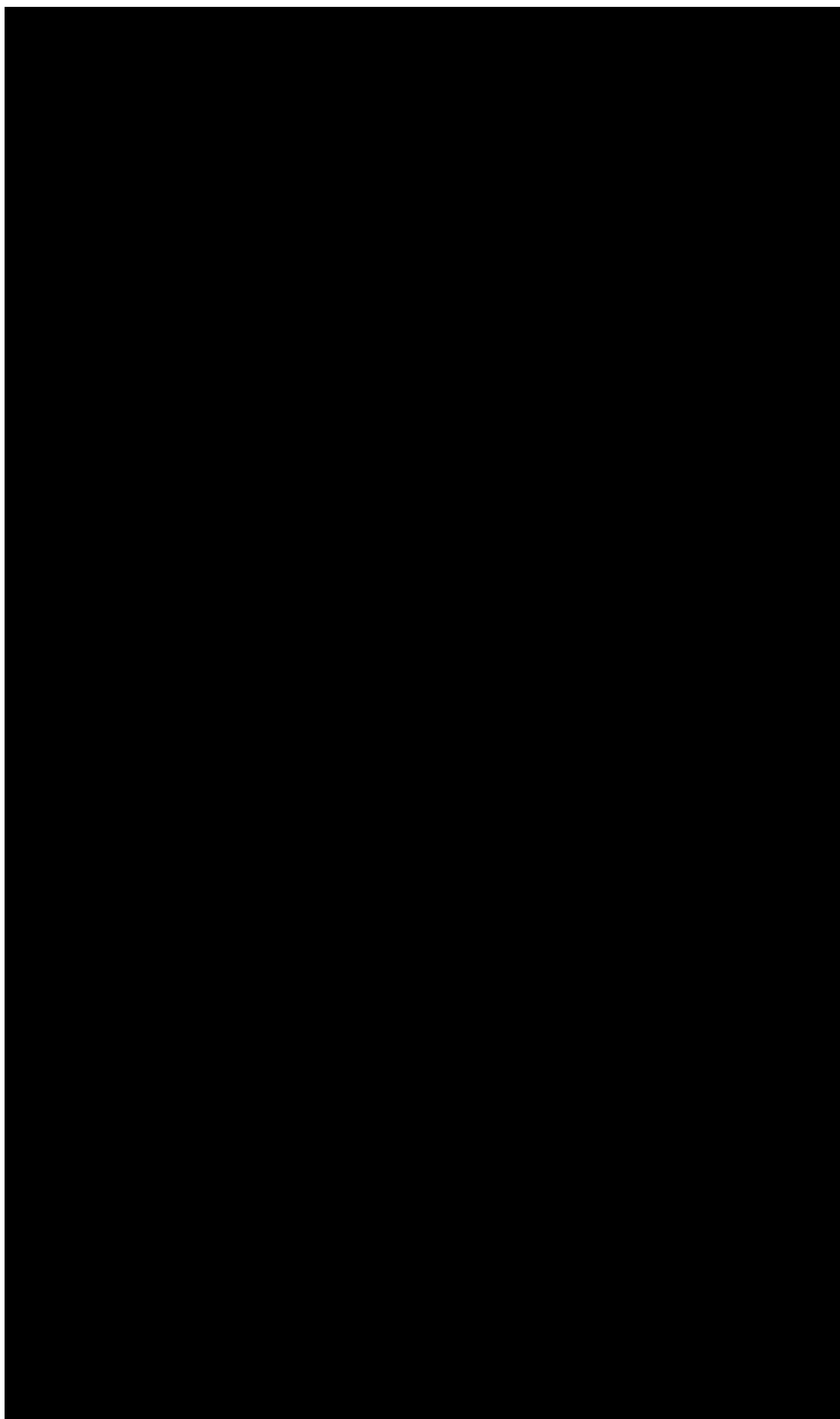
## THE RETURN











LONGJING, CHINA, 1996





WHILE WORKING AS A MIDWIFE IN CHINA, I TRIED TO LOOK FOR MY FAMILY IN KOREA EVERY CHANCE I GOT.



SINCE I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO READ, JUST IMAGINE HOW HARD IT MUST HAVE BEEN! I FINALLY WENT TO NIGHT SCHOOL AND LEARNED HOW TO READ.

I NEED YOU KIDS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR GRANDFATHER, OKAY?



I WROTE A LETTER TO A TELEVISION STATION IN KOREA. I'D HEARD A PROGRAM CALLED **TRACKING EVENTS** AND PEOPLE HELPED YOU FIND YOUR LONG-LOST FAMILY.

HAVE A NICE TRIP!





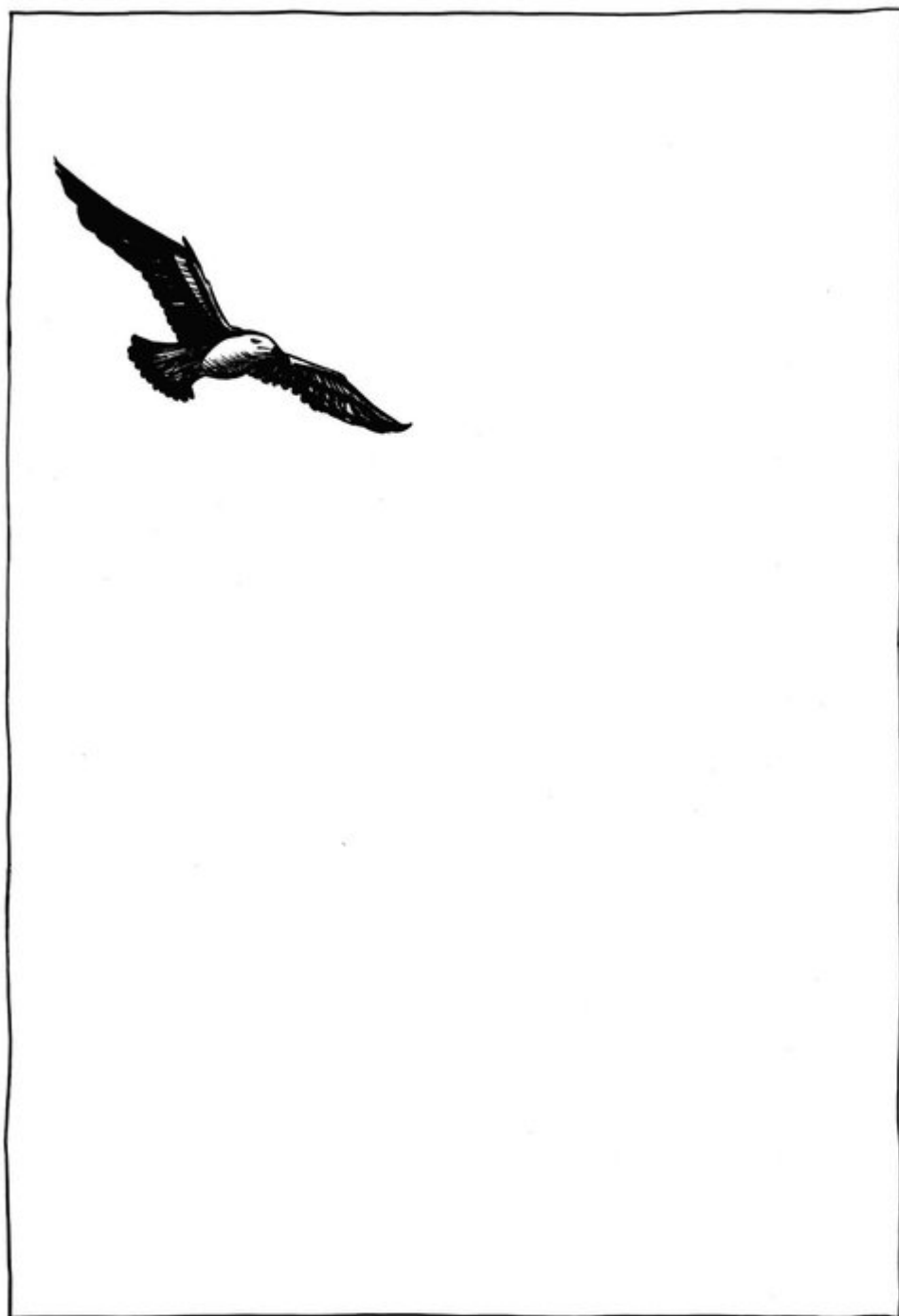














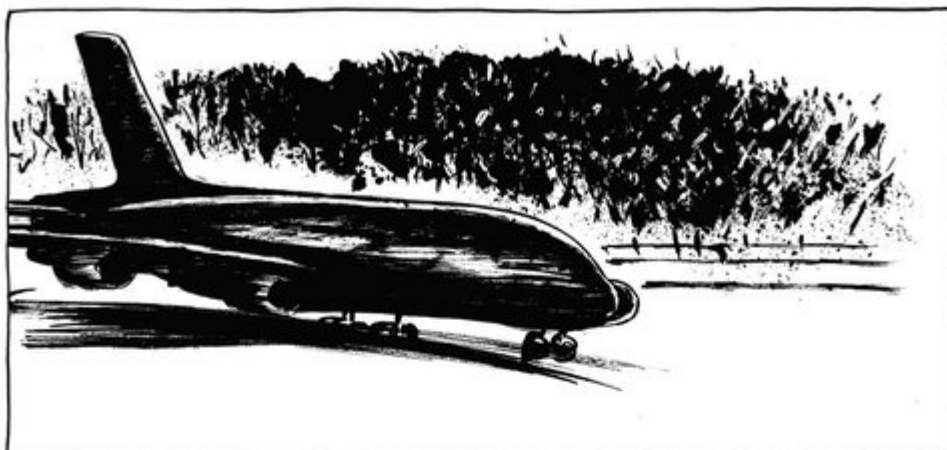








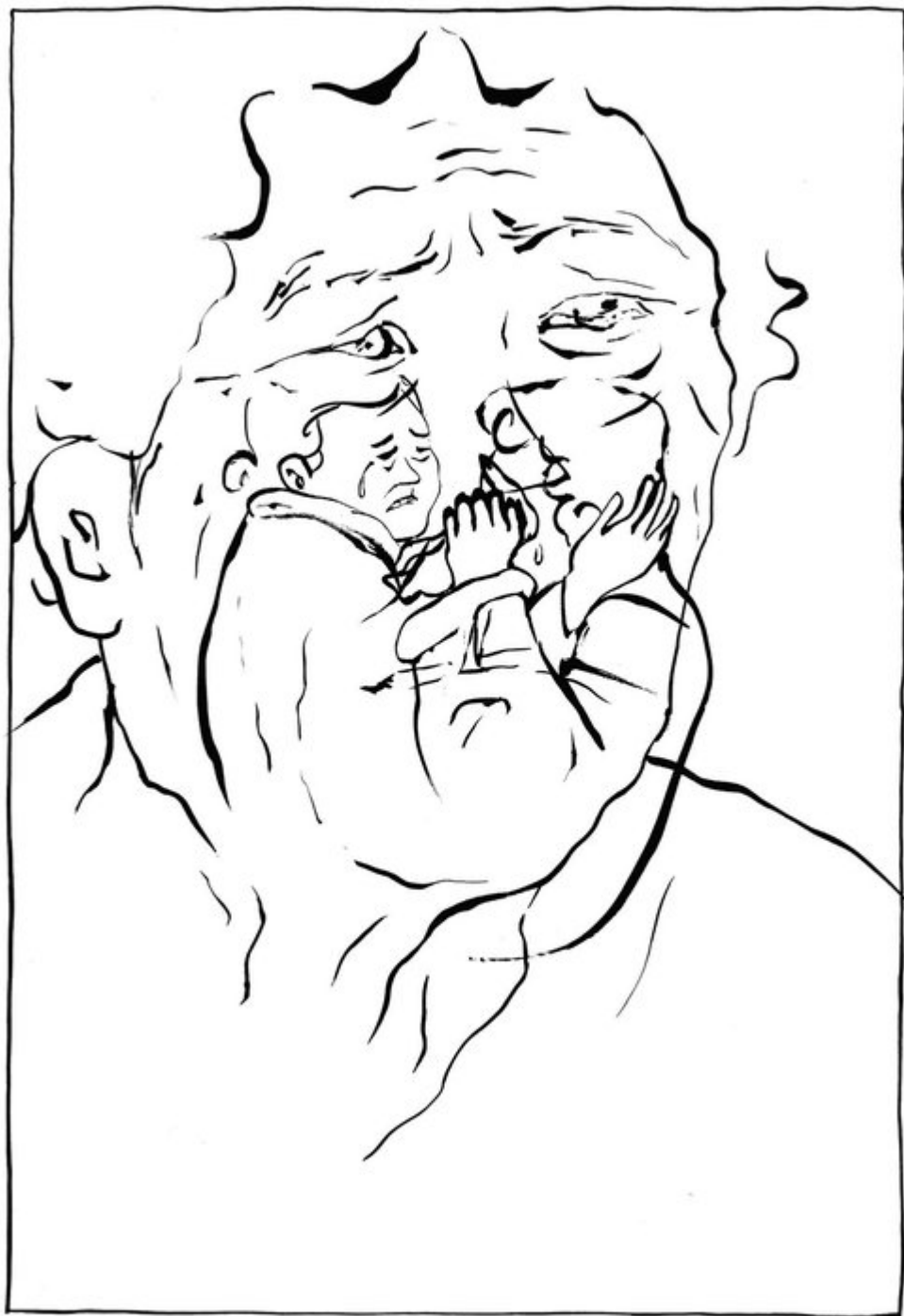














MY HOME I'D SAID I COULD FIND WITH  
MY EYES CLOSED WAS GONE.



HOW MUCH EVERYTHING HAD CHANGED!  
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ANYTHING.



EVEN WITH MY EYES WIDE  
OPEN, I COULDN'T FIND  
ANYTHING. HA HA HA

OF COURSE! YOU'D  
BEEN AWAY FOR  
FIFTY-FIVE YEARS.

THINGS CHANGE EVERY  
DAY. I GET CONFUSED  
ALL THE TIME, TOO.















WHEN I FIRST CAME HOME, EVERYONE  
SAID I'D RETURNED FROM THE DEAD.



THEY SAID I'D STAYED ALIVE  
AND COME BACK



ONLY BECAUSE MY  
MOTHER HAD  
PRAYED FOR ME  
EVERY SINGLE DAY  
UNTIL SHE DIED.



THEY SAID IT WAS  
ALL THANKS  
TO HER.



WHAT HAPPENED TO  
YOUR CITIZENSHIP?





AFTER MY HUSBAND DIED, I MOVED HERE TO THE HOUSE OF SHARING IN JUNE OF 2000



AND GOT MY CITIZENSHIP RESTORED IN DECEMBER OF 2001.



HOW DO YOU LIKE  
LIVING IN KOREA?











OTHER FAMILIES WOULD SIT  
AROUND THE DINNER TABLE,  
AND LAUGH AND TALK.  
I ALWAYS ENVIED THAT...



BUT MY SIBLINGS  
WEREN'T LIKE THAT.  
THEY JUST LOOKED OUT  
FOR THEMSELVES.

IT WASN'T FUN.



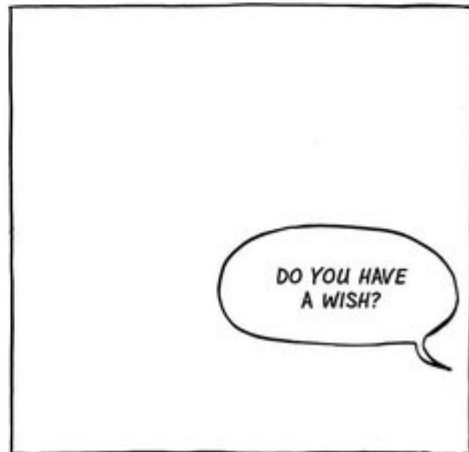
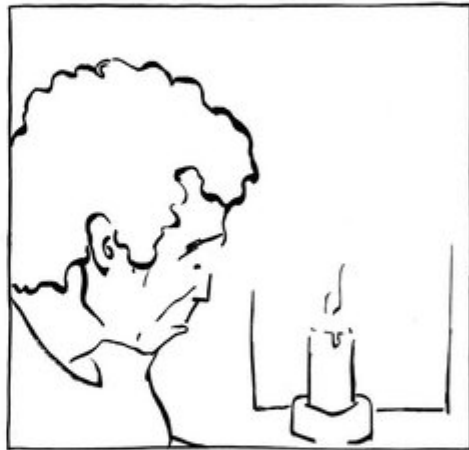
I WONDERED WHY I'D EVER  
COME BACK AT ALL.























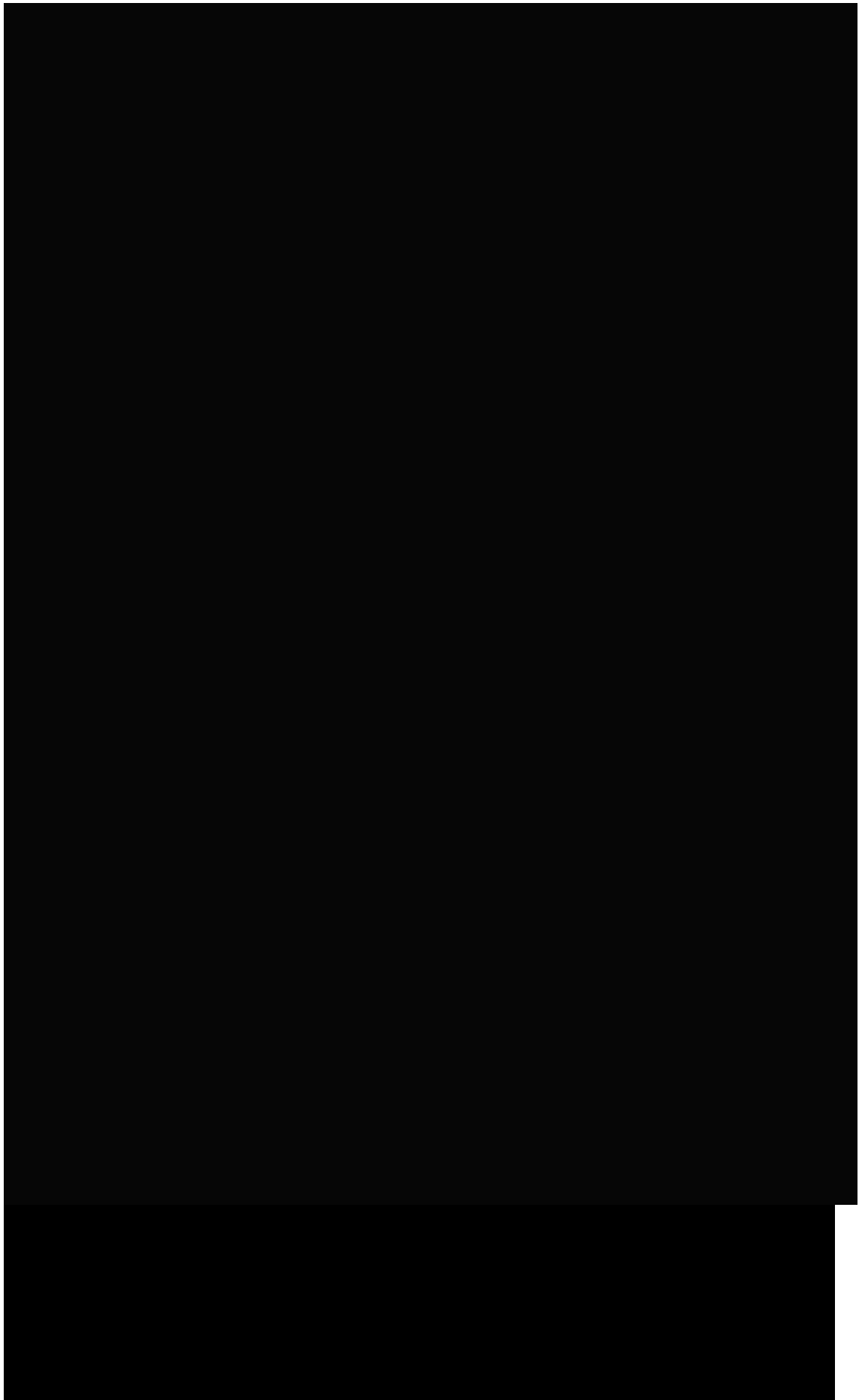


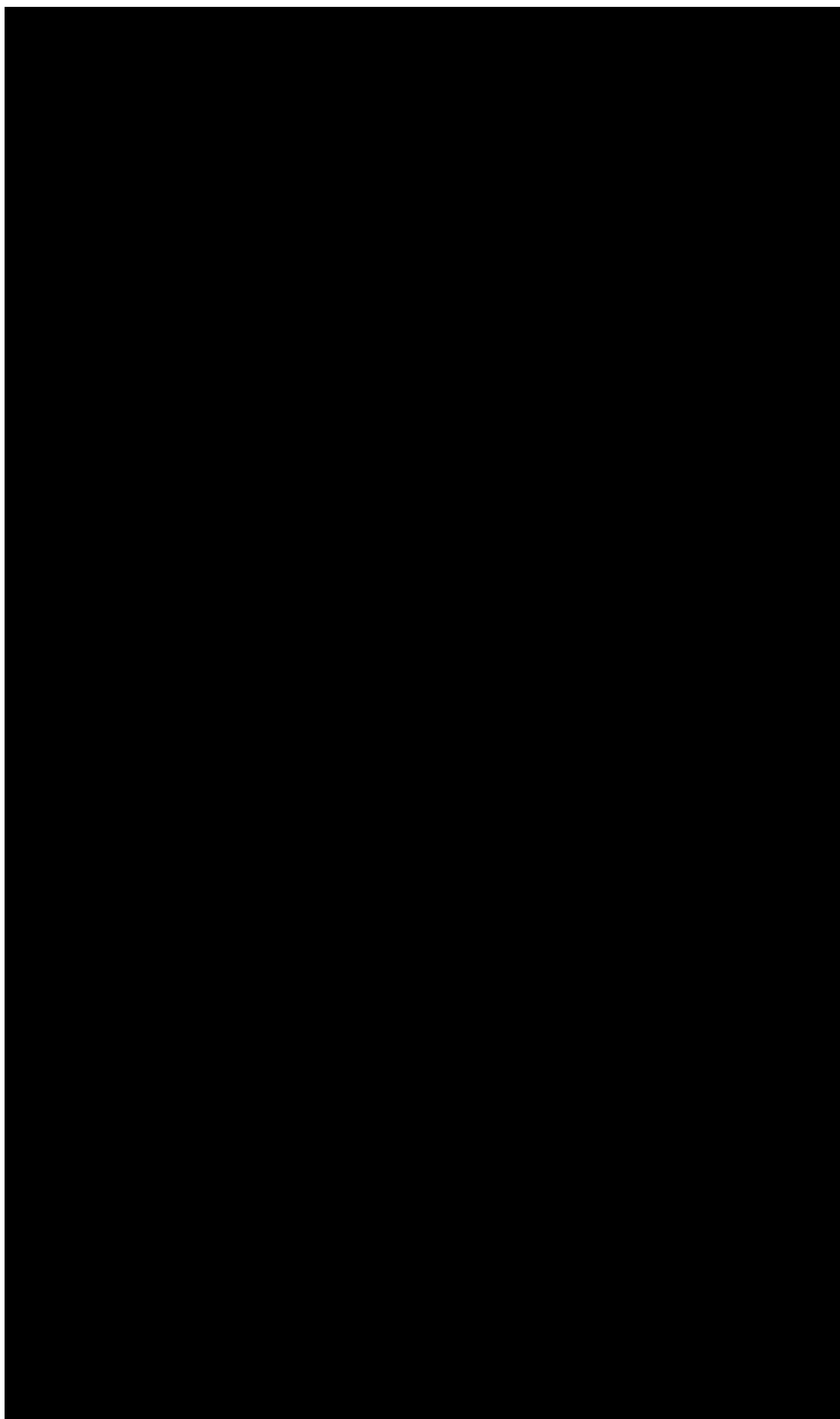








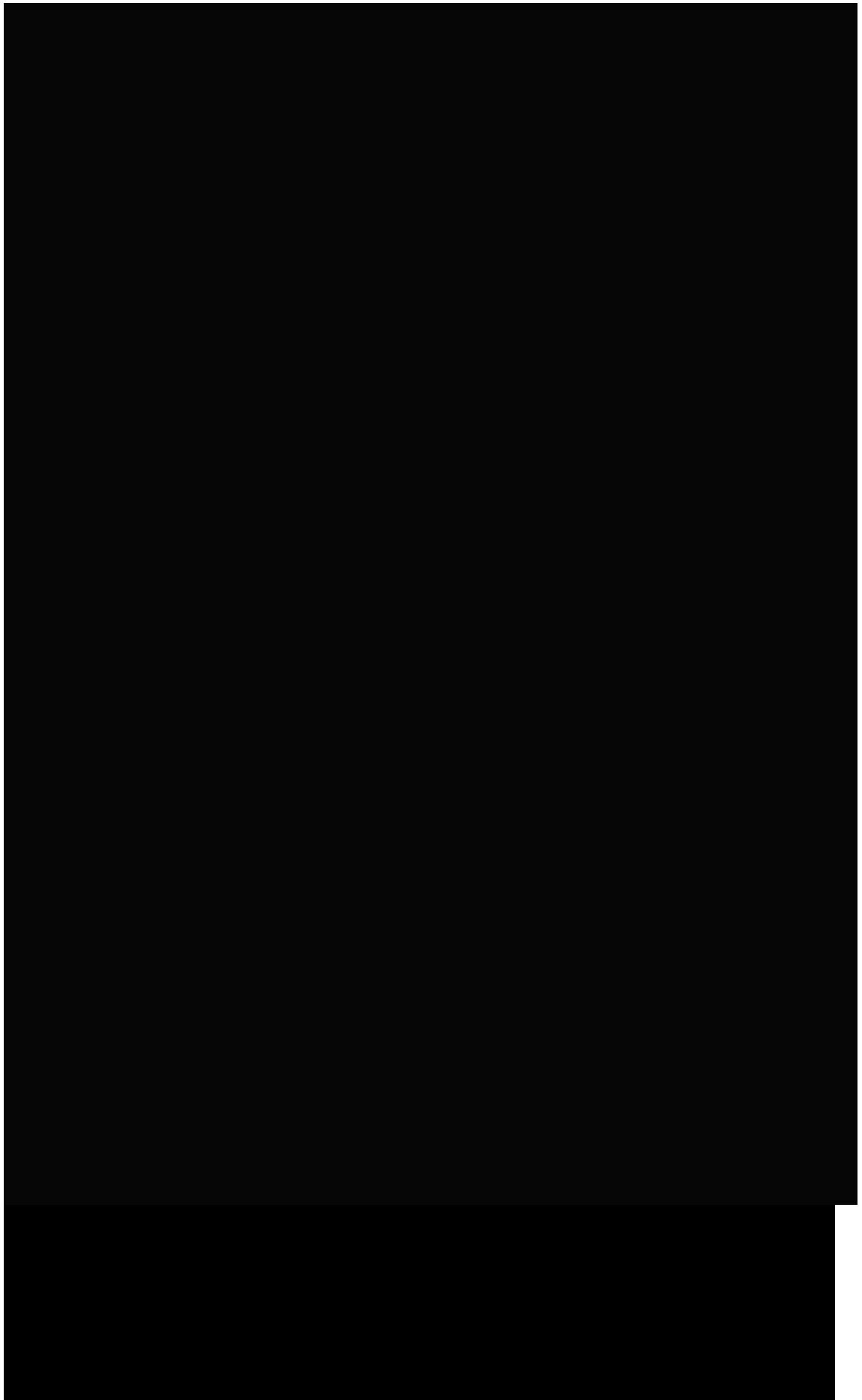


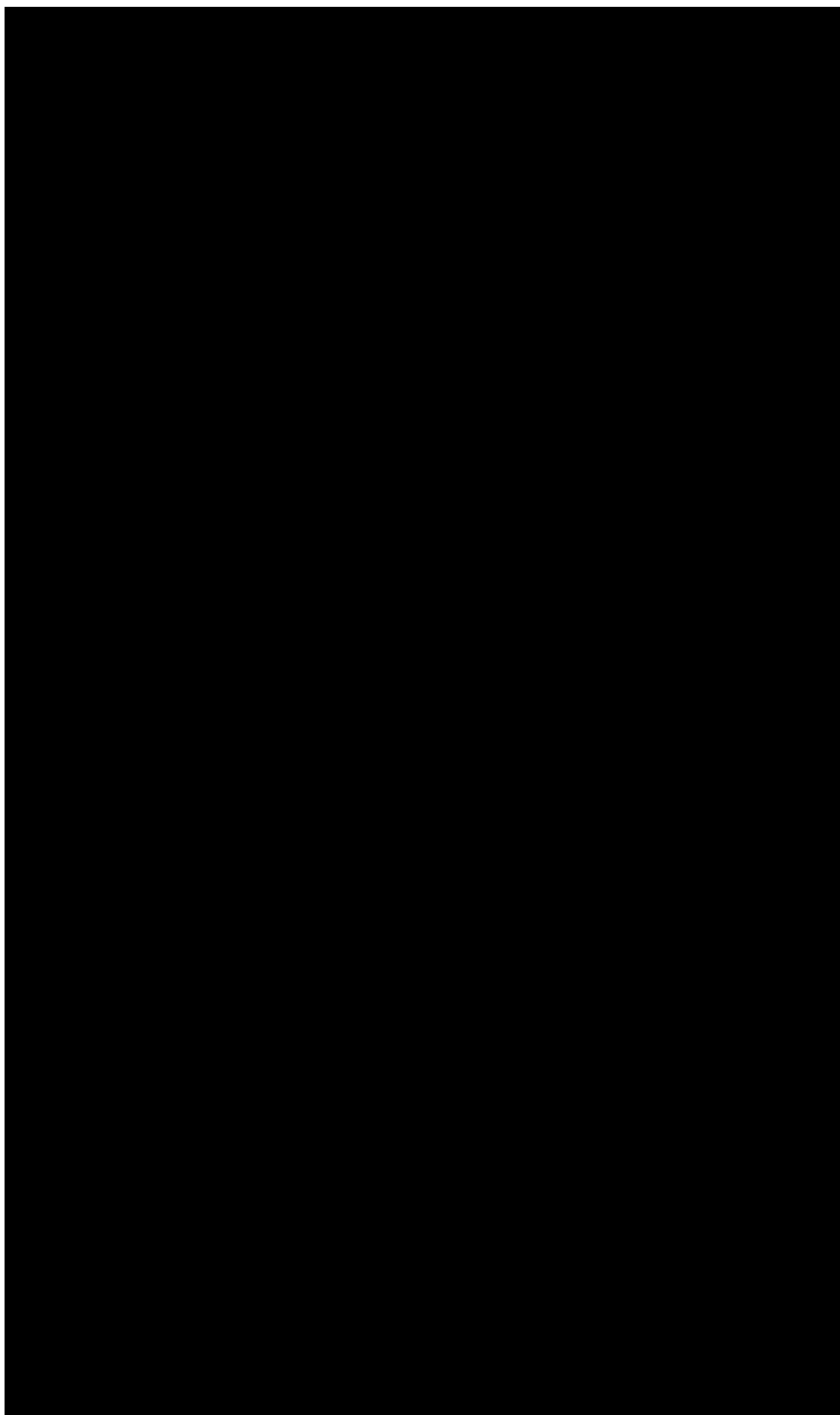


TRACING THE STEPS  
OF GRANNY LEE









SEPTEMBER 30, 2015

I DIDN'T GET MY CHINESE VISA AS EASILY AS I THOUGHT. I ONLY GOT IT ON THE MORNING OF THE DAY I WAS LEAVING FOR YANJI.



I BOUGHT SOME MEDICINES JUST IN CASE, AS WELL AS A TRAVEL POWER PLUG ADAPTER. I ALSO WENT TO THE BANK TO EXCHANGE SOME MONEY.



I HAD LUNCH AT MY MOTHER'S.

DON'T GET SICK AND WATCH OUT FOR CARS.



I DON'T USUALLY SWEAT MUCH, BUT I WAS SO BUSY RUNNING AROUND THAT I HAD TO TAKE ANOTHER SHOWER AS SOON AS I GOT HOME.



ON MY WAY OUT, I RAN INTO MY MOTHER IN FRONT OF MY NEIGHBORHOOD STORE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

OH, JUST WANTED TO SEE YOU OFF.

WHEN DID YOU GET HERE ANYWAY?



MY ELDERLY MOTHER WAS SO WORRIED ABOUT ME GOING TO CHINA FOR TEN DAYS THAT SHE'D COME TO SEE ME OFF.

NOT LONG. JUST TWO HOURS...

GO HOME, MOM.

ACTUALLY, SINCE YOU'RE HERE, WHY DON'T YOU GO SEE YOUR FRIENDS FIRST?







AT THE AIRPORT I GOT MY BOARDING PASS AND WAS WAITING FOR MS. KANG WHEN SHE RUSHED OVER.



MS. KANG!

MY GOODNESS,  
TRAFFIC WAS  
HORRIBLE.

AT 7:45 IN THE EVENING, MS. KANG AND I LEFT FOR CHINA.



...NON-STOP SERVICE  
FROM INCHEON  
TO SHANGHAI.

AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER...



PLEASE PREPARE  
FOR LANDING.

ALREADY?

WE FELT THE HOT HUMID AIR AS SOON AS WE LANDED. THERE WAS AN HOUR TIME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KOREA AND SHANGHAI.



OH, THE AIR  
QUALITY ISN'T  
VERY GOOD.

THAT'S WHY YOU  
SHOULD ALWAYS  
WEAR A MASK.

COUGH#  
COUGH#

THE GUEST HOUSE WE STAYED AT WAS CLEAN AND THE OWNER WAS FRIENDLY, BUT...



ARCH,  
EVERYTHING'S DAMP.  
MY PILLOW AND BED ARE  
STICKY.

THE AIR-CONDITIONING WAS SO LOUD I DECIDED TO PUT UP WITH THE DAMPNES.





OUR TOUR OF COMFORT STATIONS DIDN'T GO AS EASILY AS WE'D THOUGHT. NEITHER MS. KANG NOR I KNEW HOW TO SPEAK MANDARIN.



WE HAD A LIST OF FORMER COMFORT STATIONS, BUT WE COULDN'T FIND ANY, NO MATTER HOW MANY PEOPLE WE ASKED.



AFTER WANDERING HERE AND THERE, IT WAS TIME FOR LUNCH.



WE WALKED INTO A DUMPLING HOUSE BILLOWING WITH HOT STEAM.



TWO SISTERS WERE MAKING DUMPLINGS IN ONE CORNER. THE DUMPLINGS WERE IDENTICAL IN SHAPE AND SIZE, AS IF THEY'D BEEN CHURNED OUT IN A FACTORY.



AFTER WE FINISHED EATING, WE BOUGHT SOME WATER, BUT IT TASTED SWEET. WE'D MADE A MISTAKE. EVEN THOUGH WE COULDN'T AFFORD IT, SHOULD WE HAVE HIRED A LOCAL GUIDE? I STARTED TO WORRY ABOUT THE REST OF OUR ITINERARY.





AFTER ASKING AROUND, WE FINALLY MANAGED TO FIND A RUN-DOWN BUILDING THAT HAD BEEN USED AS A COMFORT STATION. LUCKILY, IT WAS CLOSE TO THE MARKET. NEAR THE ALLEY ENTRANCE SAT A STREET COBBLER.



MS. KANG SAID SHE SMELLED SOMETHING DELICIOUS, BUT I ALSO CAUGHT A WHIFF OF URINE.





WE STEPPED INTO THE OLD COMFORT STATION.



12

THE HALLWAY WAS LONG, NARROW,  
AND DARK.



AT THE END WAS A CLUTTERED KITCHEN



WHICH LED TO A GLOOMY DEAD-END  
ALLEY. I GLANCED UP TO SEE A HIGH-  
RISE BLOCKING THE VIEW.







AS I WAS MAKING MY WAY BACK, MY  
HEART DROPPED. THE LIGHT CREEPING  
INTO THE BUILDING HIT THE SHADOWY  
STEPS AND I THOUGHT I SAW A WILD  
ANIMAL CROUCHING THERE.



THE JAPANESE SOLDIERS MUST HAVE  
GONE UP THOSE STAIRS...

MY IMAGINATION TOOK OFF.  
I TREMBLED, FEELING A CHILL  
RUN THROUGH MY BODY.

WHEN I STEPPED OUT INTO THE COURTYARD, I FELT AS IF FACES  
OF GIRLS WERE PEERING OUT AT ME FROM BETWEEN ALL THE  
LAUNDRY. RIGHT THEN—





A YOUNG WOMAN STEPPED  
INTO THE COURTYARD.  
I BECAME FLUSTERED.  
I DIDN'T KNOW IF IT  
WAS APPROPRIATE  
TO GREET HER.



BUT SHE PRETENDED  
SHE DIDN'T SEE US.



I THINK SHE LIVES HERE.  
MAYBE WE SHOULD LEAVE,  
SINCE WE CAME IN  
WITHOUT PERMISSION.

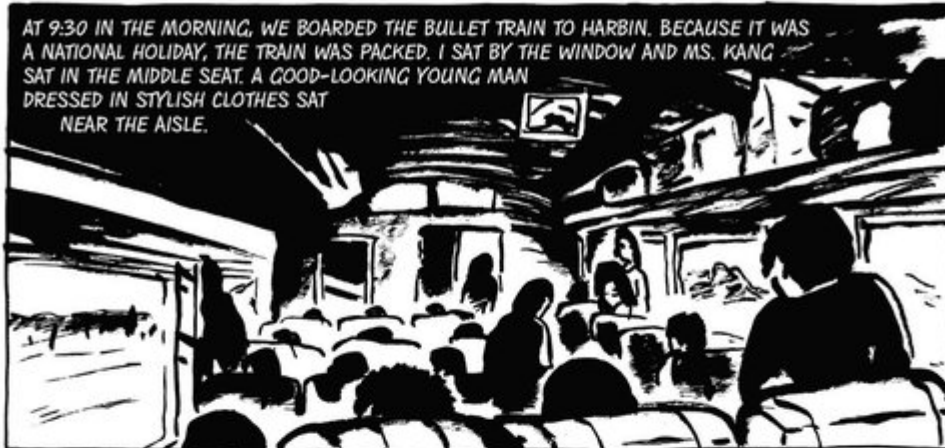


AT THE ENTRANCE WAS A HEAVY WOODEN DOOR.  
IT SEEMED TO BE IMPLOING US NOT TO FORGET  
THIS COMFORT STATION, OR THE LIVES OF THE  
WOMEN ONCE TRAPPED HERE.

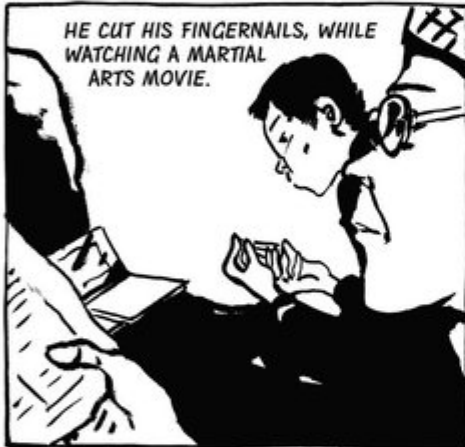




AT 9:30 IN THE MORNING, WE BOARDED THE BULLET TRAIN TO HARBIN. BECAUSE IT WAS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY, THE TRAIN WAS PACKED. I SAT BY THE WINDOW AND MS. KANG SAT IN THE MIDDLE SEAT. A GOOD-LOOKING YOUNG MAN DRESSED IN STYLISH CLOTHES SAT NEAR THE AISLE.



HE CUT HIS FINGERNAILS, WHILE WATCHING A MARTIAL ARTS MOVIE.



IT WAS A HIGHSPEED TRAIN, BUT IT STILL STOPPED EVERY HALF HOUR. WHILE WE SAT IN THE SAME SPOT, PEOPLE KEPT GETTING ON AND OFF.



AROUND NOON, THE SCENERY OUTSIDE CHANGED COMPLETELY. THE GOLDEN FIELDS DISAPPEARED AND WERE REPLACED BY DIRT FIELDS THAT HAD ALREADY BEEN HARVESTED. POPLAR TREES THAT RESEMBLED GRANDMOTHERS WITH SUN-DARKENED SKIN SHOOK THEIR LEAVES IN THE WIND.







HOW WERE WE  
SUPPOSED TO RUN AWAY  
IN THAT VAST LAND?

YOU COULDN'T SEE  
THE MOUNTAINS. FLAT FIELDS AND TREES STRETCHED  
FOR MILES. IT WAS HARD TO IMAGINE ANYTHING  
ELSE BEYOND. I THOUGHT ABOUT GRANNY LEE,  
WHY SHE HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO RUN AWAY.  
CHINA WAS ALMOST A HUNDRED TIMES  
BIGGER THAN KOREA. NOW THAT  
I'D SEEN THE LAND FOR MYSELF,  
EVEN IF IT WAS ONLY A FRACTION,  
I FELT I COULD FINALLY UNDERSTAND.



PEOPLE SWARMED PAST MS. KANG. AFTER THE FIFTH STOP, I STOPPED PAYING ATTENTION TO  
HOW MANY PEOPLE GOT ON AND OFF. WE PASSED MOUNTAINS ONCE MORE AND THEN AN  
INDUSTRIAL  
AREA. IT WAS THE  
FIRST TIME I'D  
SPENT THE  
WHOLE DAY  
ON A TRAIN.



DESPITE COUNTLESS PEOPLE  
GETTING ON AND OFF,  
THE TRAIN WAS  
CLEAN.



THERE WAS A CLEANING LADY  
WHO CAME BY  
CONSTANTLY.





WE SPENT THE NIGHT IN HARBIN AND  
BOARDED THE TRAIN TO YANJI AT  
2PM THE NEXT DAY. THEY SAID IT  
WOULD TAKE ABOUT FOUR HOURS.  
WHY WERE TRAIN STATIONS  
ALWAYS SO COLD?



OR WAS IT ALL  
IN MY HEAD?



MOUNTAINS APPEARED AS WE APPROACHED YANJI. IT LOOKED LIKE KOREA. THE TREES  
WERE BIGGER AND STURDIER. THE RANGES SPREAD BEFORE US.



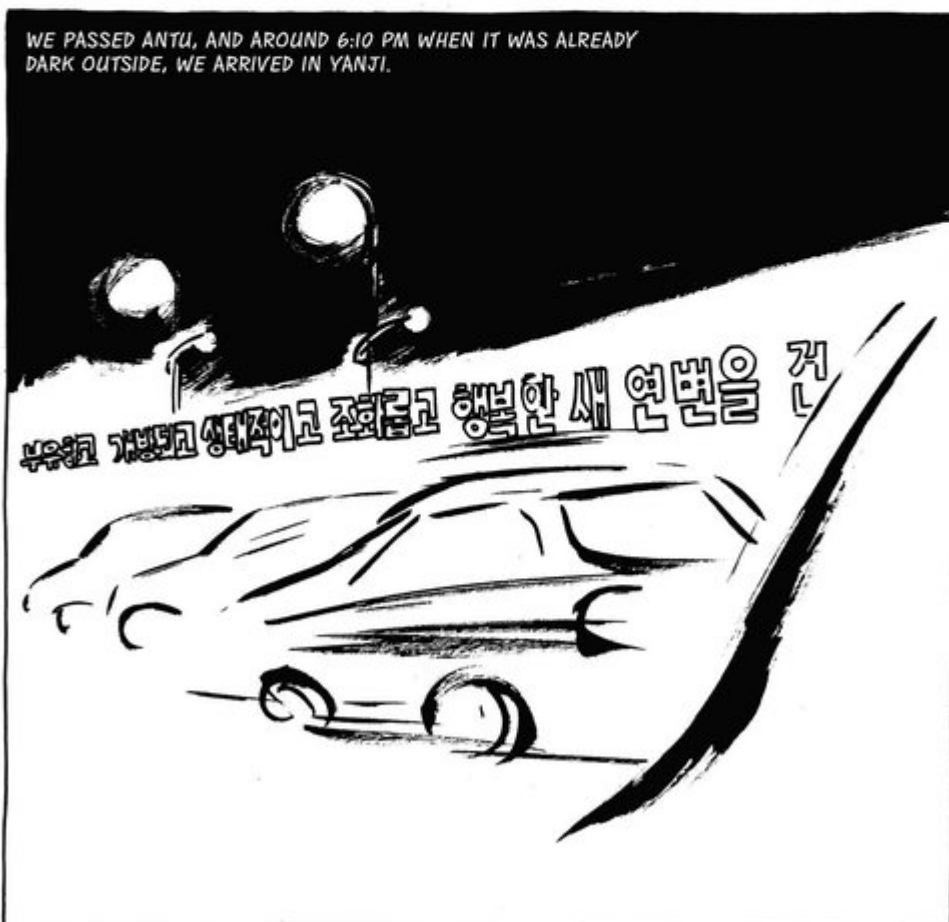
IT WAS FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON, BUT THE SUN WAS SETTING.  
I COULD ALMOST HEAR GRANNY'S VOICE IN MY EAR.



WE LIVED DEEP IN THE  
MOUNTAINS. THE ANIMALS  
WOULD COME IN THE MIDDLE  
OF THE NIGHT AND WREAK  
HAVOC ON THE FIELD.

LIFE  
WAS HARD.







TRYING TO FIND A HOTEL ROOM IN DOWNTOWN YANJI DURING A HOLIDAY WAS IMPOSSIBLE. WE MANAGED TO FIND A GUEST HOUSE OPERATED BY KOREANS. OUR SLEEPING ARRANGEMENT FOR THE NIGHT WAS SOLVED.



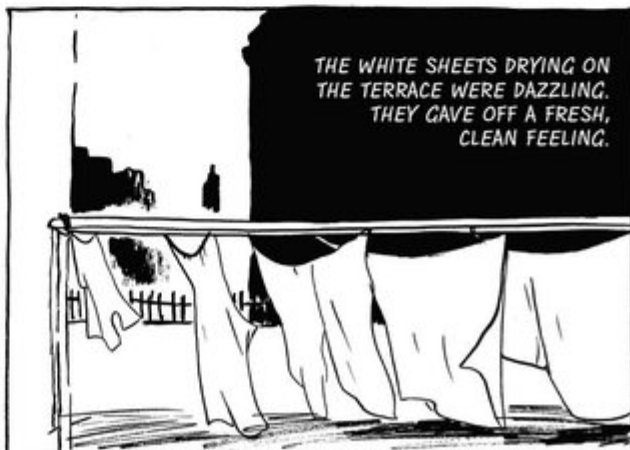
THE NEXT DAY, WE WENT FROM HOTEL TO HOTEL AND FOUND ACCOMMODATIONS IN FRONT OF YANBIAN UNIVERSITY.



THIS, TOO, WAS A HOTEL RUN BY KOREANS.



THE WHITE SHEETS DRYING ON THE TERRACE WERE DAZZLING. THEY GAVE OFF A FRESH, CLEAN FEELING.





ONCE WE'D UNPACKED, WE WALKED TOWARD THE WEST MARKET WHERE GRANNY LEE'S COMFORT STATION HAD BEEN LOCATED. SHE'D SAID THE BUILDING WAS STILL THERE.



ON THE WAY THERE, WE PASSED A PARK.



A GROUP OF ELDERLY KOREANS SAT IN TWOS AND THREES, PLAYING A GAME OF FLOWER CARDS. THEY WERE ALL VERY SERIOUS. THEY SAID THEY USUALLY BROUGHT PACKED LUNCHES AND PLAYED CARDS ALL MORNING AND AFTERNOON. MANY OF THEM LOOKED PAST EIGHTY.







WE ARRIVED AT THE WEST  
MARKET. IT WASN'T TOO  
FAR FROM THE PARK.



WE WANDERED AROUND  
THE PARK, LOOKING FOR  
THE OLD COMFORT  
STATION BUILDING.



WE EVEN ASKED AROUND.





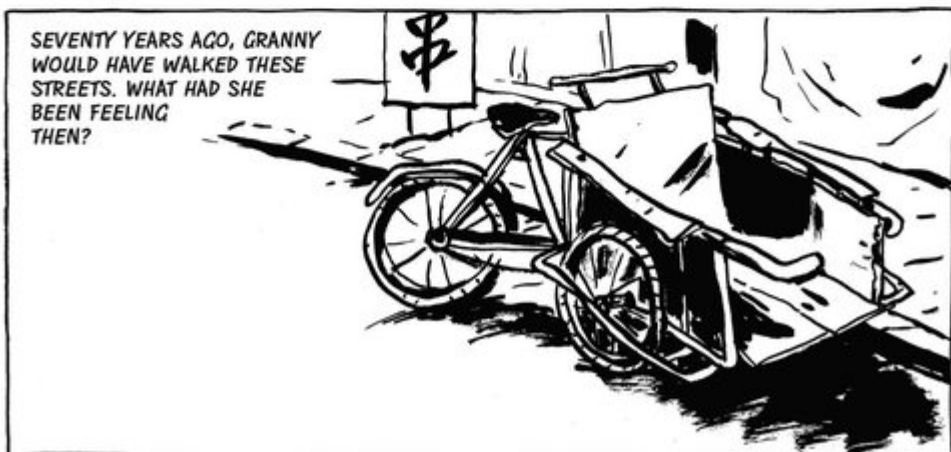
BUT NO ONE KNEW.



I SHOULD HAVE ASKED GRANNY FOR MORE DETAILS.



SEVENTY YEARS AGO, GRANNY WOULD HAVE WALKED THESE STREETS. WHAT HAD SHE BEEN FEELING THEN?





THE SUN WAS SETTING.  
WE COULDN'T FIND THE BUILDING.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NICE TO COME WITH  
GRANNY... NO. STOP. I WASN'T GOING TO  
STIR UP MORE PAIN FOR HER ANYMORE.





THE NEXT DAY A MEMBER  
OF THE YANJI ASSOCIATION  
OF PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL  
DISABILITIES TOOK US TO  
EAST YANJI AIRPORT WHERE  
GRANNY HAD FIRST BEEN SENT.



HIS RED SCOOTER CAR, WHICH LOOKED LIKE  
A SCOOTER WITH A CAR BODY, HAD THREE  
WHEELS AND COULD SEAT TWO PEOPLE  
IN THE BACK. I'D NEVER RIDDEN IN ONE  
BEFORE. IT WAS VERY LOUD, BUT FUN.



MOST IMPORTANTLY, OUR KOREAN GUIDE  
WAS FLUENT IN BOTH KOREAN AND  
MANDARIN.



THE OLD AIRPORT HAD  
BECOME A FLOUR MILL PLANT.









BUT IN ONE CORNER OF THE SITE STOOD A BUILDING FROM THE  
TIME OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION.



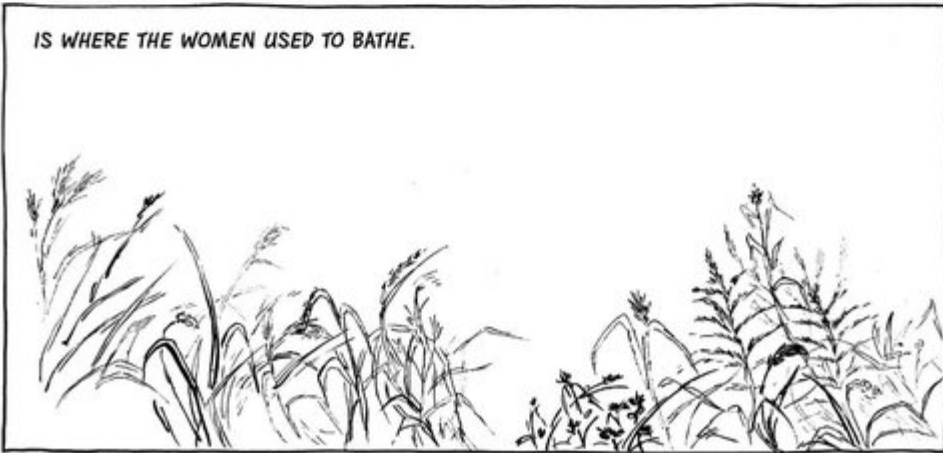
IT HAD BEEN THE JAPANESE MILITARY OFFICE.



THEY SAID IT WAS GOING TO BE PULLED DOWN TO MAKE ROOM FOR A NEW BUILDING.  
CONSTRUCTION WAS SET TO BEGIN SOON.



IS WHERE THE WOMEN USED TO BATHE.









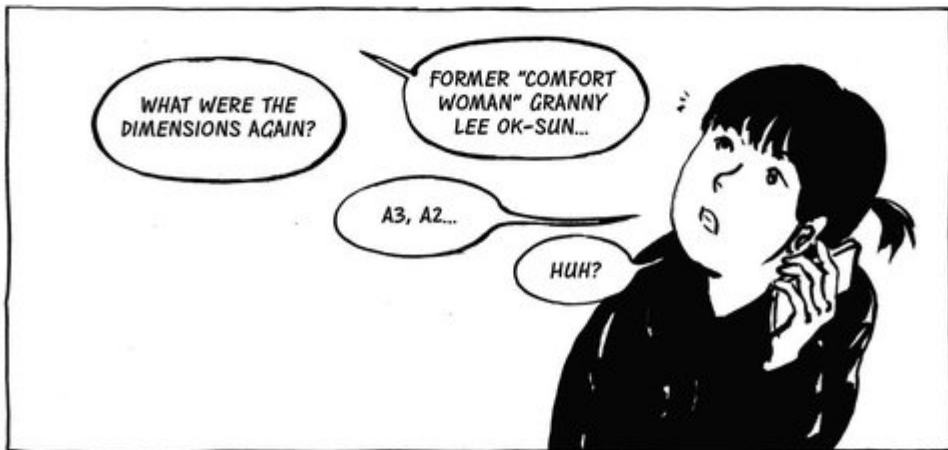




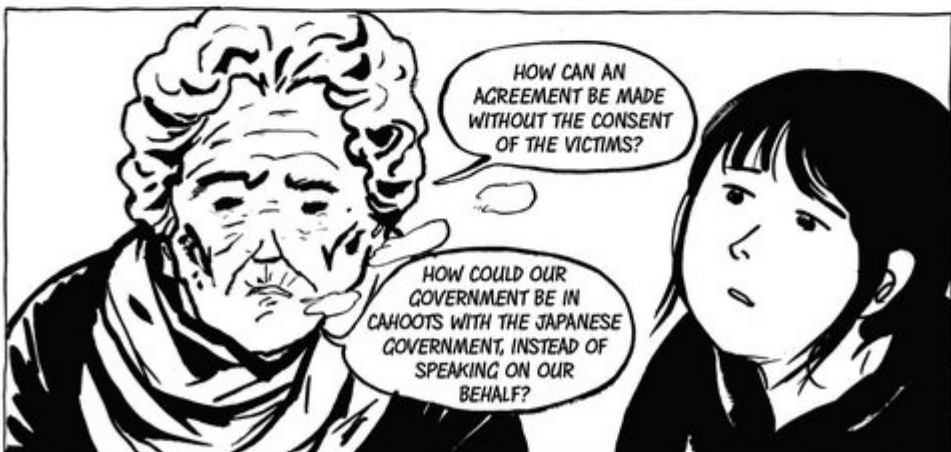












\*THE WEDNESDAY DEMONSTRATION IS A PROTEST HELD EVERY WEDNESDAY AT NOON IN FRONT OF THE JAPANESE EMBASSY IN SEOUL, DEMANDING JUSTICE FROM THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT FOR ITS PAST TREATMENT OF "COMFORT WOMEN."



EVERY WEDNESDAY, THE CRIES OF THE "COMFORT WOMEN" GRANNIES RING THROUGH THE AIR.



"JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT REGARDING THE COMFORT WOMEN ISSUE. BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAVE CONFIRMED THAT THE MATTER IS FINALLY AND IRREVERSIBLY RESOLVED. JAPAN WILL FULFILL ITS PROMISES AND SOUTH KOREA SHOULD FOLLOW SUIT."  
SHINZO ABE (JANUARY 8, 2017)



YUN  
BYUNG-SE

SOUTH  
KOREA'S  
FOREIGN  
MINISTER

"SOUTH KOREA ACKNOWLEDGES THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERNS OVER THE STATUE ERECTED IN FRONT OF THE JAPANESE EMBASSY IN SEOUL AND WILL STRIVE TO SOLVE THIS ISSUE IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER."



"WE WON'T GIVE UP UNTIL THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT GIVES US STRONGER APOLOGIES AND COMPENSATION. WE WILL KEEP FIGHTING UNTIL THE END."









WHEN THIS HARSH WINTER PASSES,  
A SUN-KISSED LETTER WILL SURELY  
COME FROM THE SOUTH, BEARING  
NEWS OF SPRING.

DELICATE SPRIGS ARE TREMBLING  
AT THE END OF A LONG WINTER.  
NEW LIFE IS STRUGGLING TO  
EMERGE FROM WITHIN.













THE GROUND THAT HAD BEEN  
SLUMBERING WAKES, AND THE  
YOUNG GRASS POKES OUT  
FROM BETWEEN THE DEAD  
WITHERED LEAVES.

GRASS SPRINGS UP AGAIN, THOUGH KNOCKED DOWN  
BY THE WIND, TRAMPLED AND CRUSHED UNDER FOOT.  
MAYBE IT WILL BRUSH AGAINST YOUR LEGS AND  
WHISPER A SHY GREETING.







HELLO!



THE WINTER IS OVER, AND THE COLD THAT SEEMED TO  
LAST FOREVER IS THAWING. SPRING HAS FINALLY COME.











## AFTERWORD

by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim



One evening in December of 2015, I was speeding down a three-lane road in my car. Suddenly the engine and all the lights shut off at once and I lurched to a complete stop. The cars behind me blasted their horns and I became so flustered I didn't know what to do. I made a panicked call to my auto insurance company and was told to go wait on the side of the road. In order to do that, I needed to cross the right lane where cars were racing by, but if I just sat waiting inside my darkened car, I was at risk of being rear-ended. Both options seemed dangerous. Until a police officer, who happened to be passing by, noticed my car and guided me to safety, those fifteen minutes felt endless.

During those fifteen minutes, the thought crossed my mind that I might die. But at the same time, I knew I couldn't. If there was a god and he allowed me to suffer even a scratch, I wasn't going to stand for it. What self-importance! What audacity! It was almost laughable. Who did I think I was? But I truly believed I couldn't die without finishing *Grass*. That's all I could think of in that moment.

Why did I think of *Grass* right then? What caused me to think of this comic book? What story did I want to tell? I hadn't begun the work lightly. Many artists had already addressed the subject of "comfort women" and even comic books had been published, so why did I want to tell the story once more? If I said I hadn't yet come across the kind of comic book I hoped to read, was I being conceited?

Initially, I wanted to discuss social class from the female perspective. How so many daughters of poor families were sacrificed during Japan's war years. How their basic human rights were stolen and they were coerced to live as slaves. The war may have been over, but they were left with pain, trauma, and shame. Then I met Granny Lee Ok-Sun. As I got to know her, I witnessed her incredible will to survive and her love for life. She was a warrior who had fought each second to live and now she is a passionate activist, speaking out against the horrors of war.

Though our time together was brief and it was rare she bared her heart or talked in depth about something, her laughter and sense of humor, even her will to read, spoke of her affection for life. As I met with her, I resolved to try telling her story in a calm and even tone. No matter my position, I avoided sensationalizing the violence, pain, and suffering of the characters. I also refrained from provocative expressions to give lightness to a story burdened with such brutality. As time went on, I realized that this story wasn't about men or women. It was about what it meant to be human.

Three winters passed while I worked on this book. It was like walking through a long, dark, depressing tunnel. Granny Lee Ok-Sun, who claimed she had never known a single happy moment since the day she was born... I knew I had to maintain a certain distance while working on her story, but I regularly had nightmares of those who had died unjustly, of them grabbing hold of my ankles and refusing to let go. I felt as if I'd become Granny Lee herself. Perhaps I would have felt better if I'd believed my work was a form of release for their pain, but this kind of thinking seemed somewhat arrogant.

This work, which appeared as if it would never end, was finally completed. Even the winter was over. It's summer now. The grannies may look similar to one another, but each of their stories is different. I haven't visited Granny Lee lately, but I sometimes see her on the Internet or the news. She has aged a lot.

Though full of failings, this book is for the late "comfort women" who have gone before us, the precious grannies who are still alive today, and Granny Lee Ok-Sun—a good daughter, loving mother, affectionate neighbor, and one courageous lady. Thank you.









**KEUM SUK GENDRY-KIM** was born in the town of Goheung in Jeolla Province, a town famous for its beautiful mountains and sea. Her graphic novels include *The Song of My Father*, *Jiseul*, and *Kogaeyi*, which have been translated and published in France. She also wrote and illustrated *The Baby Hanyeo Okrang Goes to Dokdo*, *A Day with My Grandpa*, and *My Mother Kang Geumsun*. She received the Best Creative Manhwa Award for her short manhwa “*Sister Mija*,” about a comfort woman. She has had exhibitions of her works in Korea and Europe since 2012, and her graphic novels and manhwa deal mostly with people who are outcasts or marginalized.

**JANET HONG** is a writer and translator based in Vancouver, Canada. She received the 2018 TA First Translation Prize for her translation of Han Yujoo’s *The Impossible Fairy Tale*, which was also a finalist for both the 2018 PEN Translation Prize and the 2018 National Translation Award. She has translated Ha Seong-nan’s *Flowers of Mold* and Ancco’s *Bad Friends*.

